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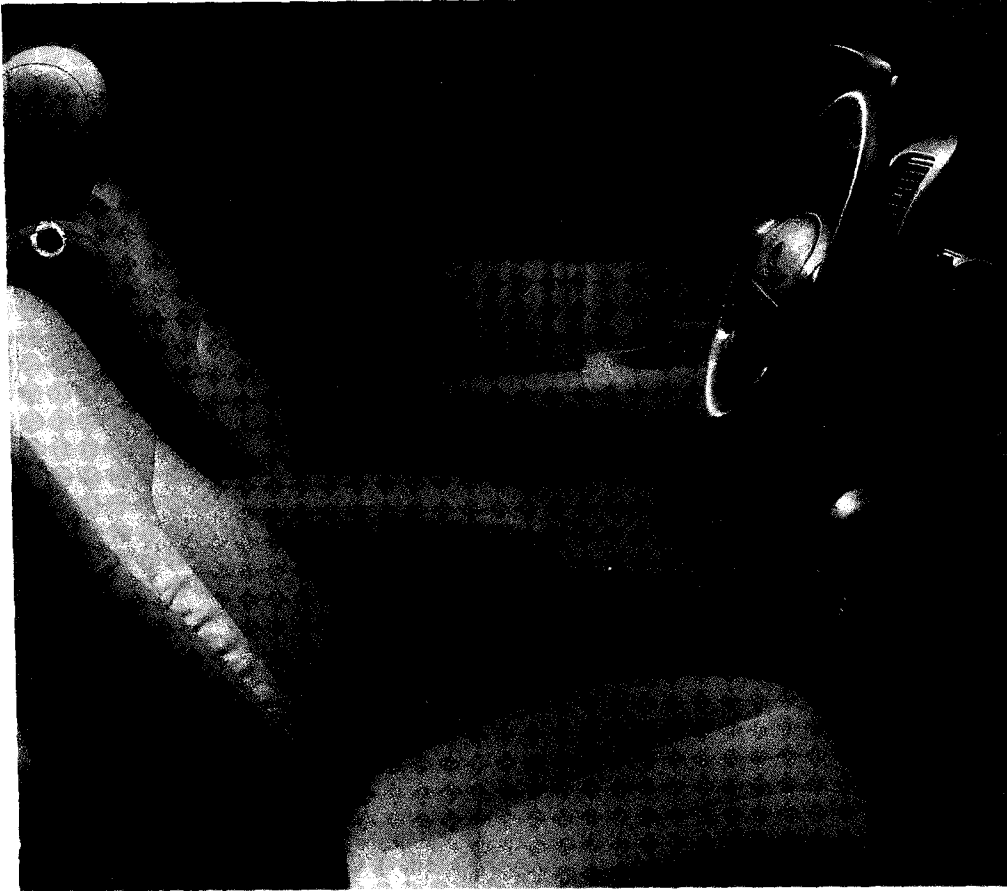
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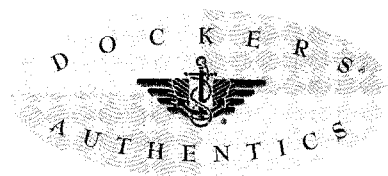
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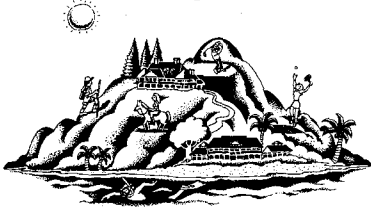


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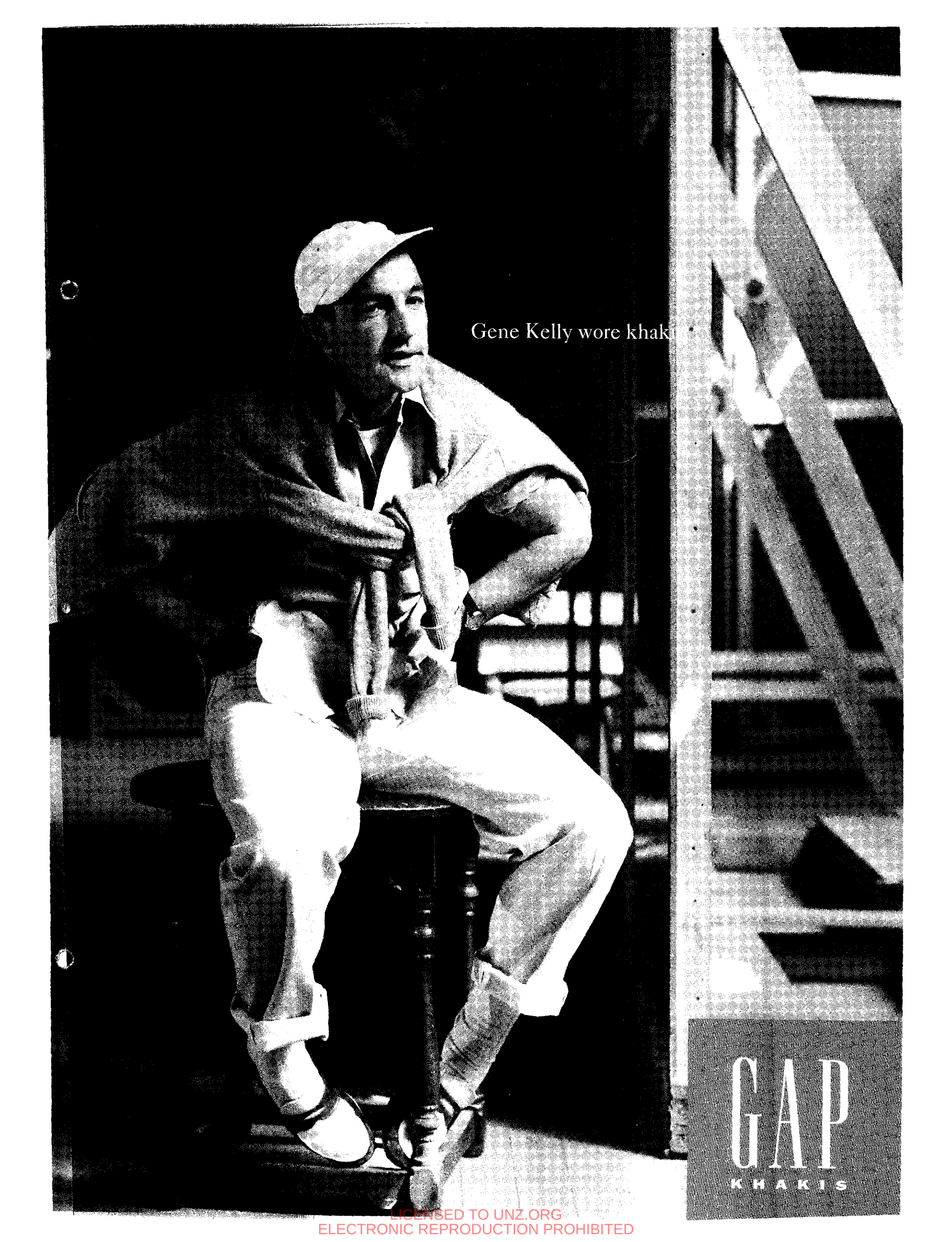


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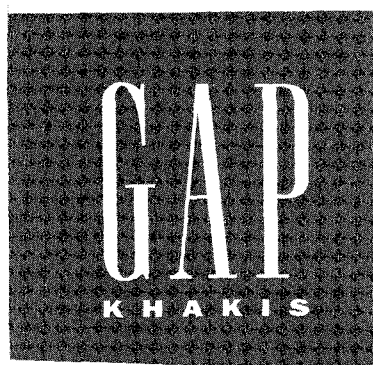
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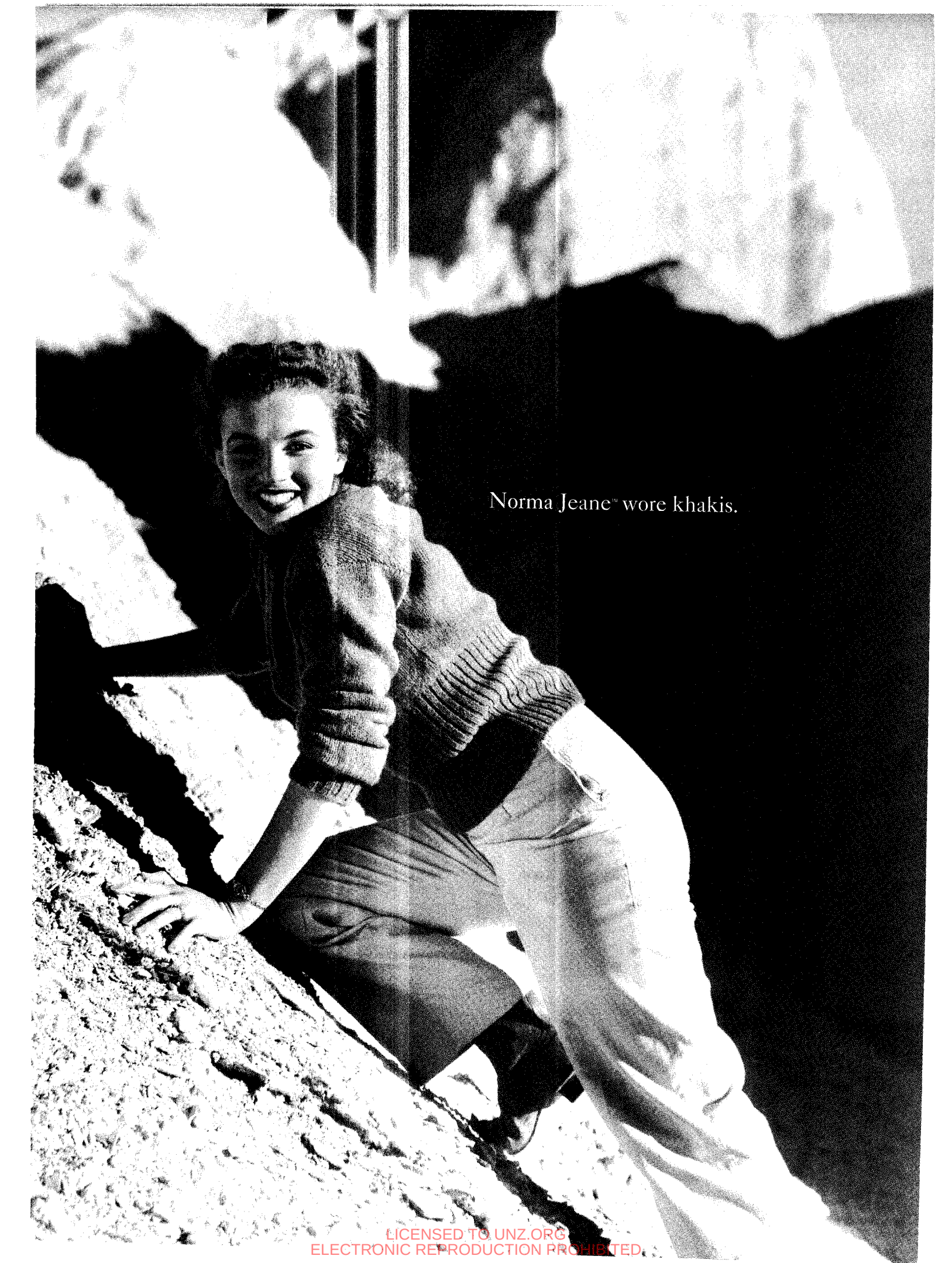


Gene Kelly wore khaki

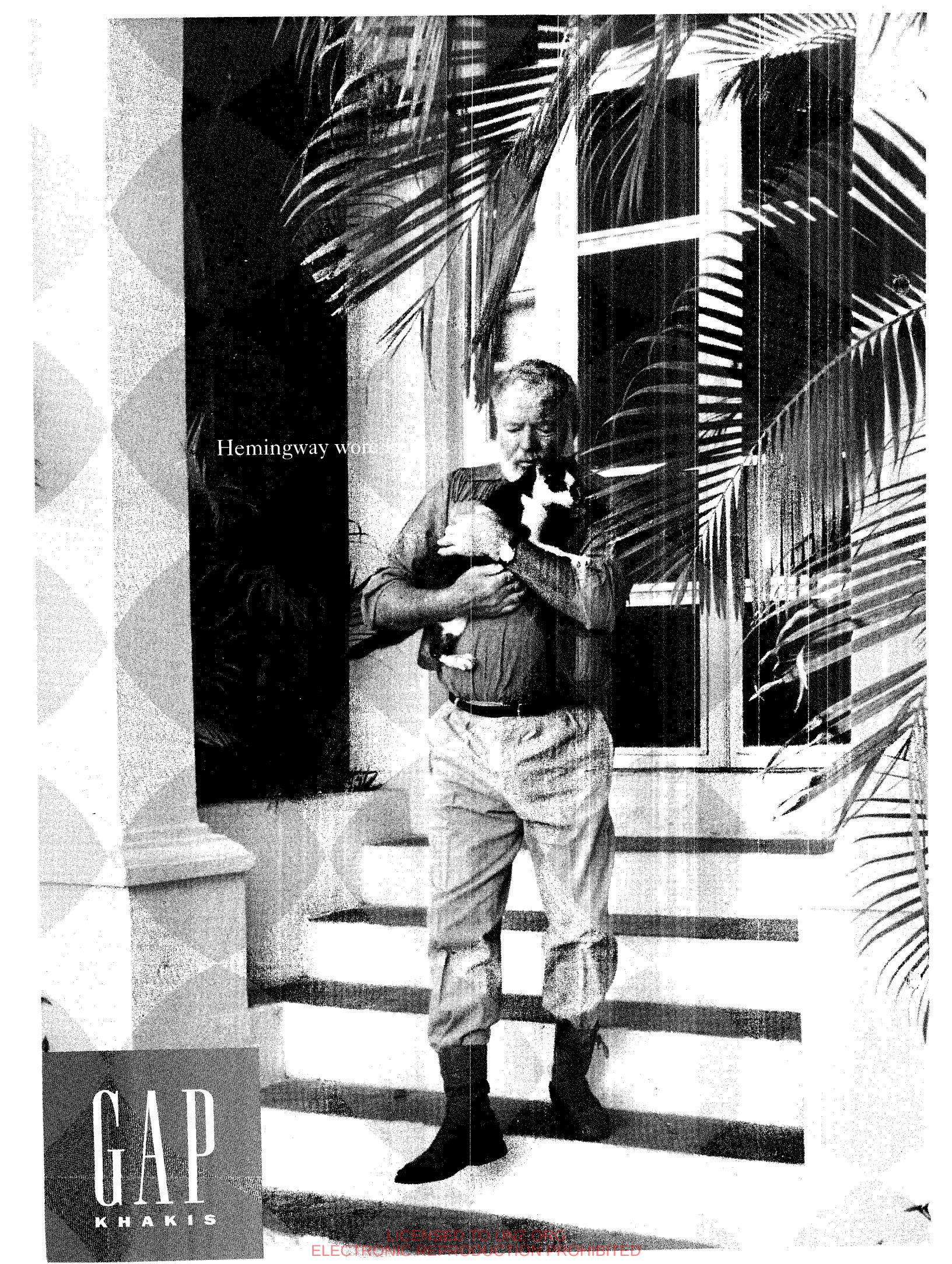
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SAVE THE ZEITGEIST!

THE nineties just don't seem to be coming together in the focussed and vigorous way one likes to see in a decade. It isn't as though people hadn't been trying to help get the thing off the ground. There has been plenty of talk, right from the start of the decade, of "nineties-style" this and "nineties-look" that—brave phrases, knowing phrases, *hopeful* phrases, but phrases that, in the end, signify little more than "not the eighties."

The idea seems to be that if the eighties were about conspicuous consumption the nineties will be about—well, *inconspicuous* consumption. This doesn't feel like a very profound development, and one suspects that what's behind it, more than anything else, is a certain brute economic reality. "There are more important things in life than chasing the big bucks" is the kind of attitude that gets tagged "nineties," but it's a sentiment that is a lot easier to express when there aren't many big bucks—or, indeed, many bucks of any size—around to chase. In any case, being distinguishable from the previous decade is a pretty minimal accomplishment. Even the sev-

enties managed that much. So why is this particular tapioca failing to gel?

The problem may be that expectations for the nineties have got themselves linked up with expectations for the Clinton Administration, so that to some extent the feeling that the nineties haven't managed to get it together is just a cosmic version of the feeling that the Clinton Administration hasn't managed to get it together. It's worth trying to de-link these things, for a couple of reasons.

The first is that the Clinton Administration is probably as together as it's ever going to be, which is to say not very. That's the nature of pragmatic, consensus-building, post-ideological politics: they don't make very impressive juggernauts. The upside of this style of politics (which has been underappreciated recently) is the absence of stridency and finger-pointing, the willingness to do business simply for the sake of getting business done. During this summer's budget battle, for example, the President had every reason to heap blame on the Republican Administrations that for twelve years kept ordering lunch and neglecting to pick up the

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check. For the most part, though, he chose to present the deficit (as he had during the campaign) as a monster that all of us created together. That is not the way either of the last two Presidents would have handled the issue. They'd still be blaming Jimmy Carter.

The downside of the Clinton political style, on the other hand, is that every compromise tends to look like a weakness of principle and resolve, and every success tends to look like a sellout. There is an unavoidably pallid, anodyne quality to the triumphs of political pragmatism, something that's reflected even in its slogans: after the New Frontier, the Great Society, and the Reagan Revolution comes—what? “Don't stop thinkin' about tomorrow.” It's not inspiring; it's not really supposed to be inspiring. You can bet that this muddling, platitudinous, vaguely pandering style of governing will make things better more reliably than partisan rabble-rousing would, but you won't be betting from your heart.

This is why every effort to graft an exciting new philosophy onto Clintonism has ended so pitifully. “Neoliberalism,” “communitarianism,” “total quality management”: these are wispy banners to lead a generation with. The grandest of the new ideas for a new decade has been “the politics of meaning,” a phrase apparently coined by Michael Lerner, the editor of the journal *Tikkun*, who passed it along to Hillary Clinton. But the concept, whatever it was, had scarcely begun to flap its wings before it got shot cleanly

out of the air by Michael Kelly in a piece on Mrs. Clinton in the *Times Magazine*.

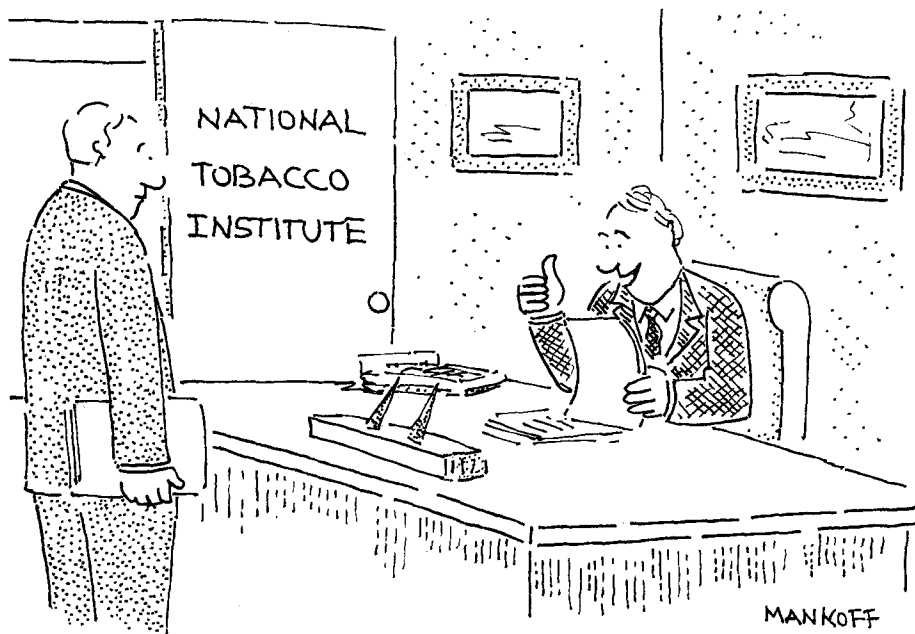
The consequence, as far as the decade is concerned, is that there is very little cultural spillover from Clintonism. The Clintons are, by every account, exceptionally charming and intelligent people, but it cannot be said that they have an aura. They impress you while they're on the air, but they don't stay in the room with you after you've changed the channel. They, and most of the members of their Administration, are famously well informed and well spoken, but they are not suggestive. Culture begins in the atmosphere; it feeds off aura and suggestiveness. If it waits for these things to emanate from the Clinton White House, it may be waiting until the year 2000.

The other reason for detaching the Clintons from our expectations for the decade is that separating cultural life from national politics might well raise the level of accomplishment in both spheres. The Clinton-Gore idea of the nineties is evidently that this is the decade in which we'll clean up the mess left over from all the other decades. Clinton and Gore don't want to revolutionize; they want to reform, and they will have an easier time doing it once the idea is accepted that, where reform is concerned, duller is generally better. Fleetwood Mac is exactly the stuff these guys should be listening to.

On the cultural side, it wouldn't be a bad idea to recognize that there really is a difference between culture and cultural policy. “Multiculturalism,” a typically

mild and centrist version of which is part of the present Administration's ideological portfolio, is a policy. It dictates that American life should be regarded as plural, and that this plurality should be represented in the office, in the classroom, in the military, in public life. Whether this proposition is “implemented” or not is a matter of great moment to many people, but it will have no effect on the quality or the interest of the movies, books, paintings, songs, and television programs we're likely to produce during the rest of the decade—just as appointing more women to political positions will not make the relations between the sexes more piquant, using different criteria for handing out the dough at the National Endowment for the Arts will not create more affecting art, and finding ways of putting more Americans through college will not make American intellectual life more exciting. Cultural life may or may not improve, but, either way, it won't be because of anyone in Washington, D.C.

The character of decades, people often complain, is an artificial category: life doesn't sort itself out into ten-year periods of differing flavors like that. The answer to this, of course, is that life doesn't sort itself out in any way at all. *We* sort it out, and characterizing decades is one of the ways we do it. Every once in a great while in New York City these days, you see, in the subway or on the street, a man in his twenties wearing a dark-blue suit, an expensive shirt with subtle stripes, a red tie, red suspenders, wing tips. His hair is moussed and combed back; he is carrying a copy of the *Financial Times*; he looks well fed. People like him exasperated you thoroughly when, only a few years back, they crowded every street and subway car, and now you realize you've practically forgotten they ever existed—just as you've forgotten the man wearing aviator glasses, wide lapels, and sideburns and singing “Stayin' Alive” to himself in falsetto ten years before him, and the guy with the American flag sewn upside down on the seat of his bell-bottoms ten years before him. There is something almost touching about this person with the red suspenders, striding so confidently and purposefully through a world no longer impressed by his confidence or enslaved to his purposes. “Wait a second,” you almost want to say. “You're in the wrong decade. You need a new uniform.” But what uniform will you tell him to get? ♦



“Love it! People of smoke’ instead of ‘Smokers.’”

X YEARS OF KAOS!



1983



1984



1985



1986



1987



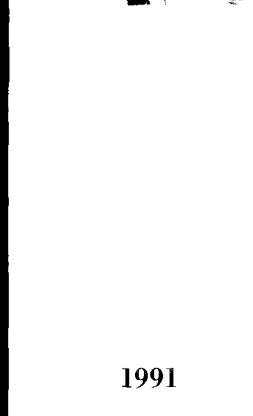
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1989



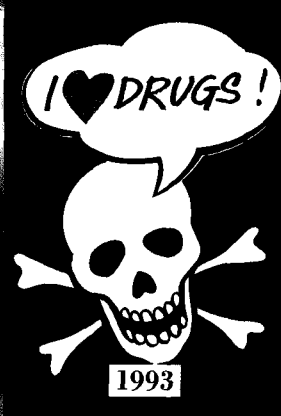
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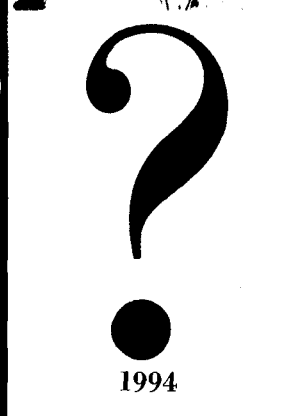
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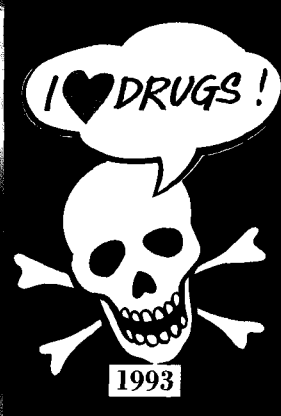


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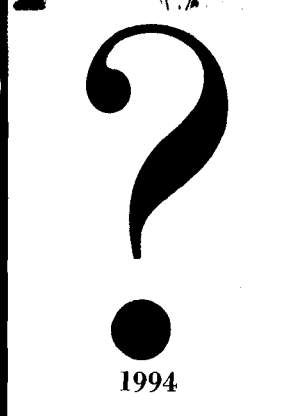


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Lulu's Back

FOR most people, the character of Lulu conjures up either a helmet of shiny black hair or one of the two electric actresses associated with the part: Louise Brooks, who played Lulu in G. W. Pabst's 1928 film "Pandora's Box," and Teresa Stratas, who fourteen years ago took on the role in the première of the three-act version of Berg's 1937 opera. Both actresses played Lulu as pure femme fatale—the archetypal man-killer created by the German playwright Frank Wedekind in his plays "Earth Spirit" (1895) and "Pandora's Box" (1904).

For years, scholars have been aware of Wedekind's earlier, single-work version of the Lulu story, in which she was less aggressive, more purely sexual. But it was not until 1991 that the play, painstakingly reassembled from an original text written in German, French, and English, had its première, in Hamburg. That stage production and a subsequent television movie have helped rekindle the Lulu cult in Germany, and started a reevaluation of Wedekind's merits as a playwright. According to Eric Bentley, whose play "The First Lulu," an English adaptation of the ur-text, will have its American première this week at the Cocteau Rep, "Wedekind has been underrated and overlooked because of his reputation as someone shocking, someone who ran afoul of all the Jesse Helmses of his day. But he is a great dramatist, and I've tried to produce an English version that conveys his strong, peculiar, and very special style."

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for schedule and ticket information.)

BLACK COMEDY/WHITE LIARS—Two comedies from the sixties by Peter Shaffer. The double bill features Anne Bobby, Keene Curtis, Peter MacNicol, Nancy Marchand, Kate Mulgrew, and Brian Murray. In previews. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

THE FIRST LULU—Eric Bentley's version of the work by Frank Wedekind, presented by the Jean Cocteau Repertory. Previews Aug. 20-21. Opens Aug. 22 at 3. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL—Michael Cumpsty, Herb Foster, Miriam Healy-Louie, Joan MacIntosh, Henry Stram, and Graham Winton have the leads in Shakespeare's play. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. Closes Aug. 29. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 861-7277.)

ANGELS IN AMERICA: MILLENNIUM APPROACHES—The first half of Tony Kushner's epic work is set in 1985, at the height of the Reagan counter-revolution, and it maps the trickle-down effect of self-interest as Kushner's characters ruthlessly pursue their private and public destinies. The Pulitzer Prize-winning play is a saga

GOINGS ON
ABOUT TOWN

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			18	19	20	21
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29	30	31				

about sexual politics, death, and decency. Not to be missed. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/31/93.) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

ANNIE WARBUCKS—The sequel to "Annie." With Kathryn Zaremba, in the musical's title role, Harve Presnell, and Donna McKechnie. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

A BETTER LIFE—A play, by Louis Delgado, Jr., set in the AIDS ward of a New York City hospital in the early eighties. (Theatre Row



Miriam Healy-Louie and Herb Foster in "All's Well That Ends Well."

Theatre, 424 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Aug. 29.)

BLOOD BROTHERS—A glum non-musical musical, imported from Britain, about twin boys who are separated at birth. The boys later become friends, love the same girl, and die violent deaths. Willy Russell wrote book, music, and lyrics, to no avail. The cast includes Shaun and David Cassidy and Petula Clark. (5/10/93) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

FOOL MOON—Bill Irwin and David Shiner are the inspired clowns in a show that is perfection itself. The only sound you'll hear is the merry music of the Red Clay Ramblers and the abundant laughter of the audience. (3/8/93) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 221-1211. Closes Sept. 5.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 1993—Once again, a galaxy of parodies that sharpen into satire. Among

the shows under consideration are "Guys and Dolls," "Falsettos," "Les Misérables," and "The Phantom of the Opera." Gerard Alessandrini, as if you had to be told, is the clever writer and director, and Susanne Blakeslee, Allison Briner, Brad Oscar, and Craig Wells are the performers. (1/25/93) (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.)

HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHOOP-DEE-DOO!—In the opening number, the cast describes this show as "old-fashioned entertainment with our special twist." There's not a better way to put it. These sixteen original songs range from a wistful love note to Elizabeth Taylor (Hilton Wilding Todd Fisher Burton Burton Warner Fortensky) to a tribute to Private Banana by his fellow-soldiers ("the new recruit is a fruit") to "Blue Flame," a gutsy number sung by a moth. Mr. Crabtree and his collaborators are witty and topical, and his costumes are ingenious and not in the least evocative of the tongue-in-cheek theme of the evening—"Less Is More." "Whoop-Dee-Do!" is an exuberant delight. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. For information about tickets, call 777-7474.)

IN THE SUMMER HOUSE—Lincoln Center Theatre presents Jane Bowles' 1953 play, with Alina Arenal, Frances Conroy, Kali Rocha, Jaime Tirelli, and Dianne Wiest. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Aug. 22.)

JEFFREY—A comedy, by Paul Rudnick, about love in the age of AIDS. It is less a fleshed-out play than a series of Scenes from Gay Life, but Mr. Rudnick can quip with the best of them. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 420-8000.)

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN—A musical, based on the novel by Manuel Puig, with a distinguished book by Terrence McNally, a star performance by Brent Carver, as the heroic homosexual window dresser, and another by the redoubtable Chita Rivera, in the title role. Harold Prince was the director. The songs are by John Kander and Fred Ebb. (5/24/93) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

LATER LIFE—The reunion, after thirty years, of a middle-aged man and woman who were once in love is at the heart of this play by A. R. Gurney. The scene is a cocktail party in Boston, where the couple are constantly interrupted by the other guests, who arrive two by two. Mr. Gurney has written with his customary wit and perception, and the actors do him proud. The play was seen recently at Playwrights Horizons. (6/14/93) (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

NOSTALGIA TROPICAL—A revue of Afro-Cuban music from the thirties, forties, and fifties, featuring Meme Solis. Performances resume Aug. 27. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 262-3333.)

A PERFECT GANESH—Terrence McNally's play tells the story of two middle-aged women from Connecticut making what turns out to be a pilgrimage through India. The acting does credit to the dramatist, which is saying a lot. Zoe Caldwell

plays a matron, and Frances Sternhagen is her travelling companion. Fisher Stevens shows admirable adaptability as every man in the cast, and Dominic Cuskern, as the Hindu god Ganesha, is a source of innocent and not so innocent merriment. John Tillinger directed. (7/12/93) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

SHAKESPEARE FOR MY FATHER—A marvellous one-woman show, in which Lynn Redgrave reviews her own life in a search for her unloving father, Michael Redgrave. She combines anecdotes, brilliant thumbnail impersonations of British actors, and wry reminiscence with passages from Shakespeare. (5/10/93) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 944-9450.)

THE SISTERS ROSENWEIG—Wendy Wasserstein's play, a comedy with serious undertones, is about the reunion in London of three American Jewish sisters—an international banker,

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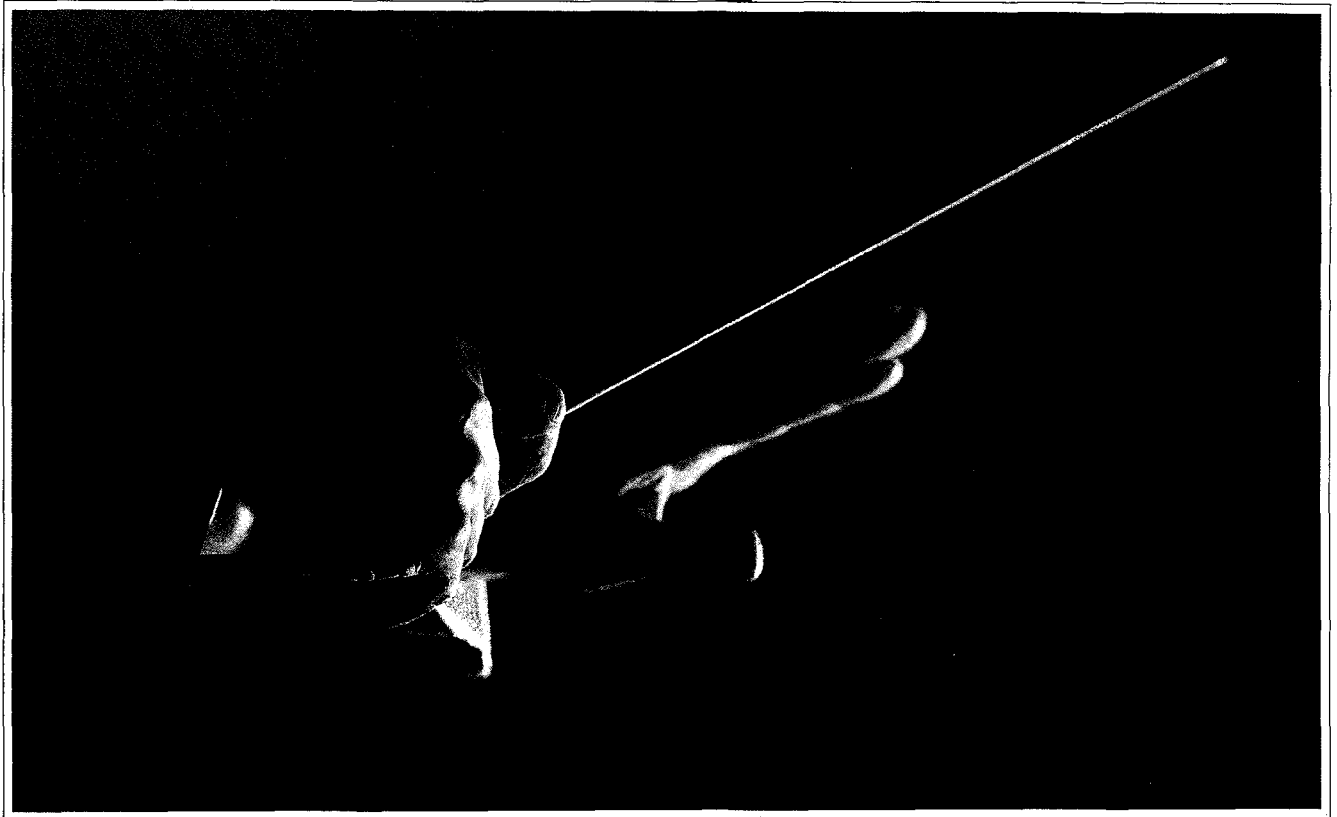
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THE THEATRE—Cont'd

a travel writer, and a wife and mother who's a professional dispenser of advice. The spirit of Chekhov hovers but never intrudes. Laughter is continuous. With Michael Learned, Linda Lavin, Joanne Camp, and Hal Linden. (11/2/92) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

SWEET DADDY AND AMAZING GRACE—Clyde Wayne MacMillan's musical is the classic preacher-meets-floozy tale with a few twists, some voodoo, and a lot of gospel singing. Christopher M. H. Wilkerson and Elmeria Rose are charming as the leads, and their voices are terrific, as are those of all the rest of the cast. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. For reservations, call 886-9850.)

THREE HOTELS—This new play by Jon Robin Baitz is no more than a technical exercise, but what technique! Debra Monk and Ron Rifkin are superb as husband and wife; the versatile Joe Mantello directed. (Circle Repertory Company, 99 Seventh Ave. S. 924-7100.)

THE WHO'S TOMMY—Pete Townshend's music—however muted for Broadway—has an indubitable thrill, but director Des McAnuff's production is caught on the horns of a theatrical dilemma that no amount of slick, exhausting spectacle can resolve. The hero, that deaf, dumb, and blind kid, is spectacularly passive, and thus unreachable, unknowable, and essentially undramatic. (5/3/93) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

BEAU JEST: Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780. . . .

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES: Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . .

CATS: Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . .

CRAZY FOR YOU: Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . .

THE FANTASTICKS: Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . .

FOREVER PLAID: Steve McGraw's, 158 W. 72nd St. 595-7400. . . .

GUYS AND DOLLS: Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . .

JELLY'S LAST JAM: Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. (Closes Sept. 5.) . . .

LES MISÉRABLES: Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . .

MISS SAIGON: Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . .

NUNSENSE: Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321. . . .

OLEANNA: Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 307-4100. . . .

PERFECT CRIME: Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 695-3401. . . .

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA: Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . .

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING: St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . .

THE WILL ROGERS FOLLIES: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 730-8200.

DANCE

Unanchored

THE great red brick arches of the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage have long since been walled up, but within its echoing reaches the choreographer Elizabeth Streb has found the perfect space for the finely calibrated rigors of her full-tilt high-impact "equipment pieces." Here, near Cadman Plaza, across an unpromising little lot and through some unprepossessing metal doors, Streb is rehearsing her new piece, "Lookup," and other work.

The Anchorage's barrel vaults and galleries—originally intended as a multi-floored shopping arcade—suggest both cathedral and dungeon. In the Anchorage—actually *inside* John Roebling's bridge—stands the focal point of Elizabeth Streb/Ringside's three-month residency: a pale-yellow wooden construction, some forty feet high, that appears to be a wall. It is not. It is, rather, an upright floor, specially constructed for this site from ordinary scaffolding. "Lookup" begins at the top of the floor. Rigged in complex harnesses, which the choreographer says "are prototypes for complete and versatile air occupation," four of her dancers make gravity work sideways, make wall into floor, cartwheel back, do-si-do in thin air. "This is where the horizontal meets the vertical," Streb says. You can watch free rehearsals Wednesdays and Thursdays from 2 to 4, and Saturdays from 1 to 4, through September 4. Performances begin September 15. (For further information, call Creative Time at 206-6674.)

IN TOWN

FELD BALLETS/NY—Final performances of the fifth annual summer preview season. Aug. 18-19 and Aug. 21, all at 8: "Play Bach," "Charmed Lives," "Ion," and "MRI." . . . ♣ Aug. 20 at 8 and Aug. 21 at 2: "Contra Pose," "Doo Dah Day (no possum, no sop, no taters)," and "Skara Brae." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY—Inaugurating the museum's new sculpture garden. (Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 W. 125th St. 864-4500, ext. 237. Aug. 21 at 7.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL—Aug. 18-19 at 8, Aug. 20 at 8:30, and Aug. 21 at 2 and 8:30: Ballet British Columbia. . . . ♣ Aug. 20 at 8, Aug. 21 at 5, and Aug. 22 at 7: Eiko & Koma. . . . ♣ Aug. 24 at 8: Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. Through Aug. 28. (Becket, Mass. 1-413 243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

A Star Is Reborn

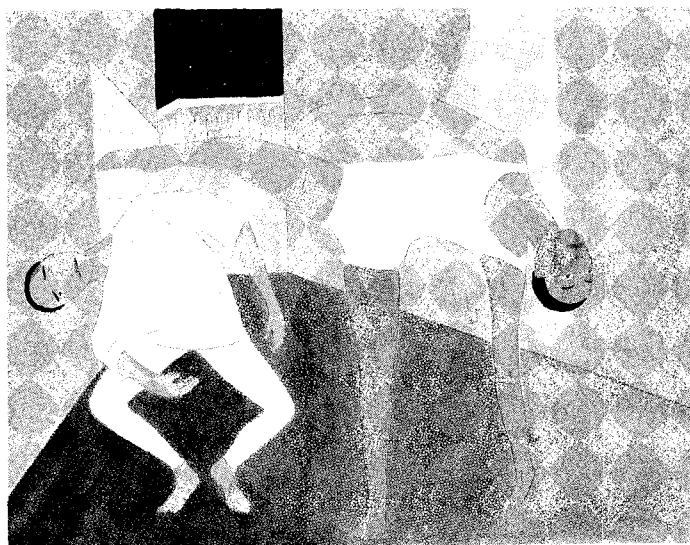
AFTER Sinéad O'Connor was booed off the stage at last year's Bob Dylan tribute, lots of people in the audience may not have recognized the guy who was comforting her. It was singer-songwriter-guitarist Kris Kristofferson, who's responsible for such gems as "Me and Bobby McGee" and "Help Me Make It Through the Night," and who still rounds out the stellar country band the Highwaymen, with Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash, and Willie Nelson. Kristofferson hasn't been in the limelight much these days, but in the past year he has been "working the honky-tonks." "Crazy Love and the Prophet"—the name of the show he's bringing to the Bottom Line on August 20 and 21—is a kind of self-styled retrospective.

Kristofferson describes the show as "a little piece of theatre." He shares the stage with the pianist-singer Danny Timms, and he's pleased with the arrangement. "You have a chance to focus more on the songs with two people," he says. "The shows can get dramatic, almost spiritual."

For a while, Kristofferson didn't have a record label, but when three members of his former band, the Border Lords, defected to play with Bonnie Raitt, she felt so bad she set up a meeting with producer Don Was, the career resuscitator behind Willie Nelson's "Across the Border" and Raitt's "Nick of Time." The result was "fourteen sides cut in four days." The album—called "Crazy Love and the Prophet," the same as the show—is expected by Christmas on M.C.A. Kristofferson also has movie projects in the works, as well as benefit concerts in Belgrade and Zagreb; a live Highwaymen album will be recorded in January. To what does he attribute his piled-high plate? "Oh, I don't know. Maybe they were saying, 'Holy shit, he works cheap.'"

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type is used to pick out some of the more notable performers in town. . . . ♣ Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives that are subject to last-minute change; it is therefore always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

ALGONQUIN HOTEL, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The Oak Room will offer night owls a week-end of unusual promise before all parties turn in till the other side of Labor Day: a Dorothy Parker centenary bash, on Aug. 20-22. Mrs. Parker, of course, belonged to the literary tribe that seated itself in circular fashion at the Algonquin in the twenties and thirties. Though she wrote a good deal of verse (mostly light) and short stories, posterity remembers her as the wisecracking master of the ironic epigram. Who better to celebrate her than MARY CLEERE HARAN, the cleverest, most literate chanteuse of the current generation? Her acts always revolve around first-rate musical renditions of popular song classics, and her sly, engaging patter is icing on the cake. Dining.



Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company
at the Studio Museum in Harlem's Sculpture Garden.

BIRDLAND, 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—This northern restaurant-bar, an airy two-tiered space with pastel walls and potted greenery, is a shade too slick for Columbia students but just right for post-collegiate jazz fans. The name is taken from the long-gone midtown pleasure dome that featured Bird himself. Dining.

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, a gift shop, and, of course, those incredible shrinking aisles that turn a mid-set dash to the rest room into something of a steepchase. On Aug. 24-29, the legendary **BETTY CARTER** fronts a trio of piano, bass, and drums. Carter started out singing with Lionel Hampton's band when she was eighteen, at which time Hampton christened her Betty Bebob. Since then, she has sung with Dizzy, Charlie, and Max, to say nothing of Ray, on the classic 1961 album "Ray Charles and Betty Carter"—simply one of the greatest duet recordings ever. Dining.

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—A great black loft that's jammed with row after row of tables—it looks a little like the site of a standardized test. Despite the cramped quarters, though, the Bottom Line is a pleasant place to take in a show of folk or rock. **KRIS KRISTOFFERSON** will appear with pianist Danny Timms on Aug. 20-21.

CAFÉ SIN-É, 122 St. Marks Pl. (982-0370)—Don't be misled by the sleepy, hole-in-the-wall atmosphere of this bohemian Irish café, or by the fact that the place has no stage and no music schedule. While patrons have been writing in journals, rolling cigarettes, or lingering over their Rolling Rocks, some pretty fine musicians have turned up and tuned up: Sinéad O'Connor, Marianne Faithfull, and Luka Bloom, to name a heady few. On Aug. 22, a wonderful new Irish band called the **CHANTING HOUSE** plays rock and roll with a traditional Celtic twist. The House's credits thus far include opening shows for Daniel Lanois and for Bono's buddy Gavin Friday. On Aug. 25, catch a singer-songwriter who calls herself babe gurr—à la k. d. lang or e. e. cummings. Gurr's funky pop encompasses a variety of exotic influences, from reggae textures to Middle Eastern rhythms.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle is closed for the summer, but across the hall in Bemelmans Bar singer and pianist **KURT WIETING** offers elegant relief to the city-bound.

EAGLE TAVERN, 355 W. 14th St. (924-0275)—Where swordfish leap on almost every wall. Where a cat with black and white spots sometimes walks the length of the bar. Where bar birds stare at sports on the tube. And where, between the Sinatra and Streisand tunes that emanate from the jukebox, one can often hear snatches of live folk and Irish music floating in from the back room. On Aug. 20, Tom Dunne—a fiddler and button accordionist from County Wexford—will provide charming folk music with his band.

FAT TUESDAY'S, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—The seating arrangement in this long, narrow, red-velvet-and-mirror-walled basement makes flying coach seem roomy; nevertheless, it's one of the city's top jazz spots—thanks largely to the club's talent bookers. But watch your head. Pianist **ROLAND HANNA** and vocalist **CARRIE SMITH** continue through Aug. 22. On Aug. 24-29, one of the bebop era's great alto sax players, **PHIL WOODS**, is in residence, with his quintet. Beginning Aug. 31: the warm, lush singing of Carol Sloane. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **LES PAUL** leads a trio. Dining.

GRAND, 76 E. 13th St. (777-0600)—A cross between an old-fashioned split-level night club and a parking garage decorated for a senior prom. Despite the balloons and the candy-colored lights, this is a serious room for serious rock-and-rolling. You can either vibrate up front, near a wall-o'-speakers, or lounge around the bar in the back and follow the show on a video monitor. Two

English bands that emerged in the wake of the seventies' punk explosion headline this week. The **FALL** (Aug. 20) is fronted by the lovable crank Mark E. Smith, who is worth seeing, whether he's clinging to the irony of the Kinks' "Victoria" or merely fixing his keen, lyrical gaze on whatever's bothering him at the moment. The **MEKONS** (Aug. 27) are a gang of old lefties who have gone from anarchic punk to dance rock to country, and arrived, finally, at a punkish mixture of all of the above.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St.—This two-floor establishment has been all things to all people: meeting hall, rock club, jazz club, Off Broadway theatre. Physically, the place is sagging a bit, but it has an odd, dingy charm. On Aug. 19, **CATHERINE WHEEL** appears. This East Anglia grunge-metal band has had the good fortune of being produced by Gil Norton but the misfortune of being compared with other notches in Norton's belt (Pixies, Belly, Echo & the Bunnymen).

Catherine Wheel's second effort, "Chrome," encourages close inspection, and the eponymous title song promises revelation. But what it reveals might be better suited as protection gear for the band's namesake martyr. For concert information, call 249-8870. . . . ♣ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday night, at the Continental Club. The dancers all share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. On Aug. 22, the **HI-TOPS** are in. The **BIG SWING** takes the stage on Aug. 29. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

JUDYS', 49 W. 44th St. (764-8930)—An intimate, burgundy-walled *boîte* attached to the Iroquois Hotel. In the front room, which is decorated with photos of famous Judys—and of the famous daughter of a famous Judy—a pianist keeps the happy-hour patrons happy. Vocalists work out in the dining room. Closed Sundays.



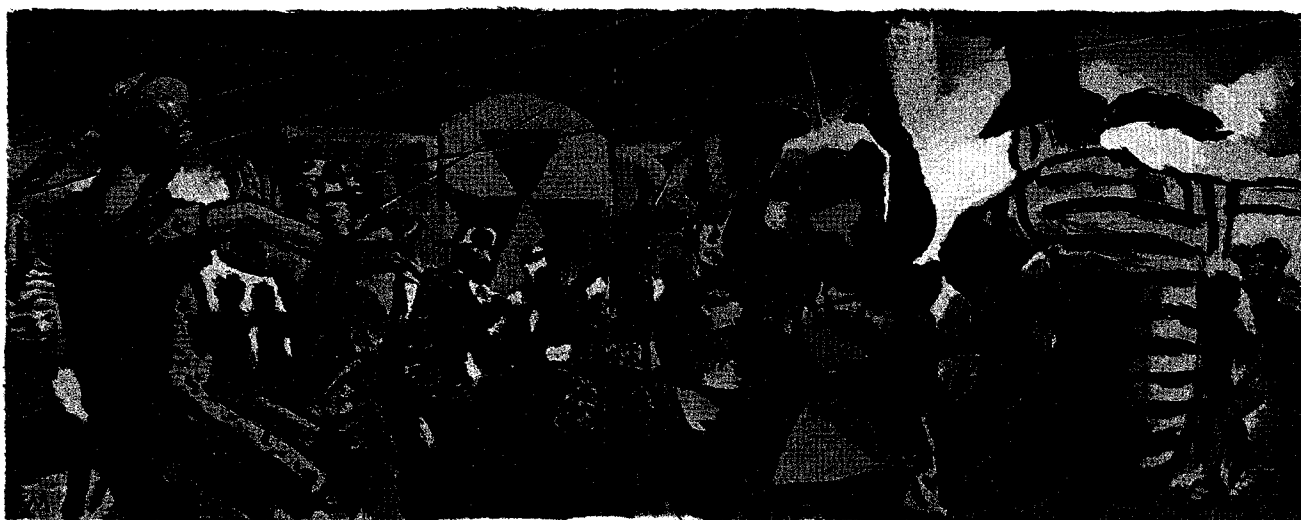
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NASA at Shelter.

LA CAVE ON FIRST, 1125 First Ave., at 62nd St. (759-4011)—Though situated in the basement of an Upper East Side Mexican restaurant (Pancho Villa), this is an establishment worth checking out. There's nothing trendy or even distinguishing about it, and that may be the secret of its appeal. The entertainment varies, from tap dancing one night to gospel the next. Closed Sundays.

LONE STAR ROADHOUSE, 240 W. 52nd St. (245-2950)—It's named for its Texas décor, but lately a more apt name would be the Second Chance, since so many lost, forgotten, or faded rockers turn up here. The club's busy schedule includes a variety of newer acts, too. On Aug. 19, **IVAN NEVILLE** (Aaron's son) appears. Neville has played keyboards for such rock luminaries as Keith Richards and Bonnie Raitt; he also has a soulful voice worthy of his lineage. The Philadelphia-based band the Badlies leads a bill of straight-ahead rock and roll on Aug. 24, with guests the Armadillos and 78 West. Dining.

MANNY'S CAR WASH, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—This blues bar stands apart from the Upper East Side's usual array of singles bars and has become a big draw for the neighborhood's army of postcollegiates. The neon beer signs, Manny's caps, and funky drinks lend the place a frat-house aura, but don't let that put you off: this long, dark, brick-walled room is a good spot to catch blues artists both major and minor. Among **JOHNNIE JOHNSON'S** credits is a five-year stint as arranger and keyboard player for Chuck Berry. On Aug. 19, Johnson brings his own five-piece band to the club. David Keyes will open. Another quintet, led by guitarist Johnny Allen, plays contemporary urban blues on Aug. 20-21, and a six-piece R. & B. outfit led by singer Joy Ryder appears on Aug. 23. On Aug. 22, Aug. 25, and Aug. 29: the Pops Chubby Blues Band.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken. (1-201 798-4064)—Many of the bands that play here today will be playing somewhere more expensive tomorrow. Rock critics' darlings the **MEKONS** appear on Aug. 26. On Aug. 27, the delightful neo-country outfit **BLOOD ORANGES** headlines, with alternative-rock bands Speed the Plough and Purple Ivy Shadows opening. The guitar-driven pop of the Muffs is featured on Aug. 28, with eccentric guests the Didjits.

RAINBOW & STARS, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—Not to be confused with its richer cousin, the Rainbow Room, which is just down the hall. There you'll find expansive Art Deco glitter; here intimate nineties glitter. The performers, with their backs to the window, have to compete with a view of the Hudson, the George Washington Bridge, and

beyond. A Lerner and Loewe revue, "The Night They Invented Champagne," starring **MAUREEN BRENNAN**, **EDDIE KORRICH**, **JULIET LAMBERT**, and **MARTIN VIDOVIC**, will close here on Aug. 28. This light but energetic show presents such classics as "On the Street Where You Live" and less well known numbers like "She Is Not Thinking of Me." The singers have big, confident voices and an intimate way with lyrics—no thanks to an overbearing sound system. Closed Mondays.

RITZ, 254 W. 54th St. (541-8900)—This decaying theatre, once the home of Studio 54, is now the site of one of the city's biggest, oldest, and loudest rock clubs, which was formerly in the East Village. The club features a broad stage, mobile-home-size speakers, plenty of room to shimmy, and, for the sedentary, a giant Big Brother video screen. Formed in 1969, **MOUNTAIN** roared out of New York City a few years later with the rock-radio hit "Mississippi Queen." On Aug. 21, the band roars back in, led by founding member Leslie West, whose primal guitar work has always been the band's most compelling asset. The drummer Corky Laing, who's been with the group since its heyday, will also be there.

SHELTER, 6 Hubert St. (677-2582)—NASA provides late-night raves here on Fridays. For the uninitiated, bright stripes and huge pants are de rigueur in both the house-music room and the techno room of this Tribeca haunt, and manic energy is a must. (Gum, lollipops, and spring water are available to refresh the weary.) Tune in, turn on, and bop out, from midnight till 8 a.m.

TAVERN ON THE GREEN, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—With the opening of the Chestnut Room, this legendary tourist haven is making a bid to attract serious jazz fans. The club, which resembles a hunting lodge, is every bit as over the top as the rest of the establishment, but the bookings have been impressive. The vocalist Mark Murphy continues through Aug. 29 (excluding Aug. 19 and Aug. 23); then, beginning Aug. 31, catch the **RAY ALEXANDER** sextet, featuring jazz pianist **KENNY BARRON**. Dining.

TIME CAFE, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Hidden inside this trendy restaurant is a two-story club called Fez. Upstairs is a sumptuous Moroccan bar and lounge appointed with satin couches, mosaic tables, and Arabian-style fixtures. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is rather plain in comparison, but still a sleek and comfortable spot to take in a show. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** packs them in every Thursday. The fourteen-piece ensemble, directed by baritone saxophonist Ronnie Cuber, concentrates exclusively on the tricky, cacophonous work of its catalyst, the late Charles Mingus. On

Aug. 21: the buoyant postmodern rock of **MIRACLE LEGION**. Then, on Aug. 28, the sultry and eloquent singer-rapper **ME'SHELL NDEGE OCELO** returns, to whet your appetite for her upcoming debut album, "Plantation Lullabies." Dining.

TRAMPS, 45 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—A broad, spacious, and agreeable club, near what was once called Ladies' Mile but might now be termed the pool-hall district. The pillared, loftlike room is decorated in a hodgepodge, vaguely Bourbon Street manner, and sight lines are above average. On Aug. 26, Tramps welcomes local heroes **URBAN BLIGHT**. Having formed as a ska band a decade ago, Blight has since mixed other elements of reggae and funk into its world beat. The resulting brew has made the eleven-piece band a big draw on college campuses and the club circuit. The **SNOOKS EAGLIN** band, with George Porter, Jr., playing bass, is here Aug. 28-29. **VILLAGE GATE**, 160 Bleecker St. (475-5120)—In the airy space known as the Terrace Bar, the **ANDY BEY** trio holds court Aug. 18-22. Bey sings, in addition to tickling the ivories. On Aug. 25-29, another piano-bass-drums combo performs, led by pianist **KENNY DREW, JR.** (son of the late pianist Kenny Drew, Sr.).

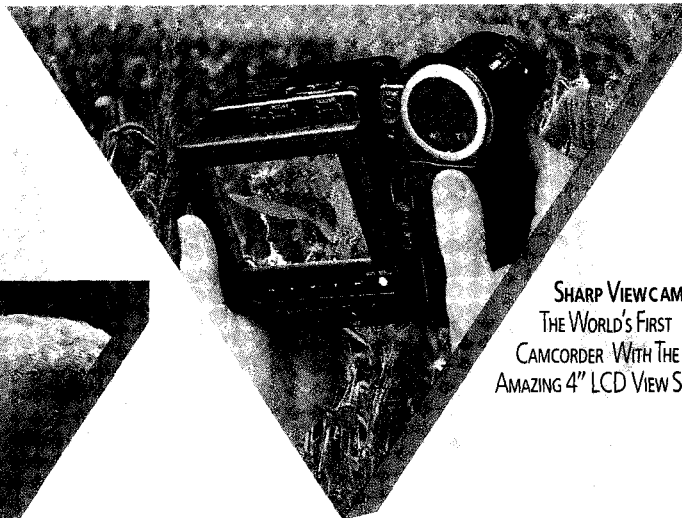
VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The world's most famous jazz club is also the last place in town that still looks, feels, and smells like a classic jazz club—subterranean, smoky, and thick with the spirits of past masters. Through Aug. 22, catch the **DAVID MURRAY** trio, with venerable tenor-sax player Murray, bassist Fred Hopkins, and drummer Andrew Cyrille. On Aug. 24-29, electric guitarist **KENNY BURRELL'S** quartet takes over, with pianist James Williams, bassist Peter Washington, and drummer Sherman Ferguson. Beginning Aug. 31: the **BILLY CHILDS** trio.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—This locus of grooviness is usually thought of as a Deadhead hangout, but the club has also been the launching pad for a generation of young New York bands, like Blues Traveler and the Spin Doctors. Shows here can be absurdly tight and sweaty—the club seems to have a hard time turning people away. On Aug. 20: a triple bill featuring the Celtic-flavored rock and roll of Oral Groove and the driving alternative pop of the Bogmen and Rockland County-based headliners **LAST TRIBE**. You can catch more postmodern rock on Aug. 21, with **GUMBALL**, a band fronted by Don Fleming, who has produced such college-dorm heroes as the Posies, Screaming Trees, and Teenage Fanclub. Opening for Gumball is contemporary music's latest nod to seventies pop culture: Eve's Plum, whose lead singer is said to evoke Debbie Harry more than the actress who played Jan Brady.

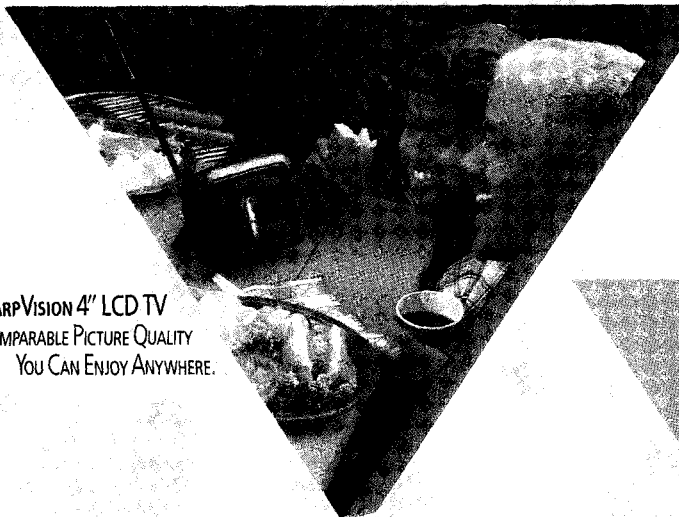
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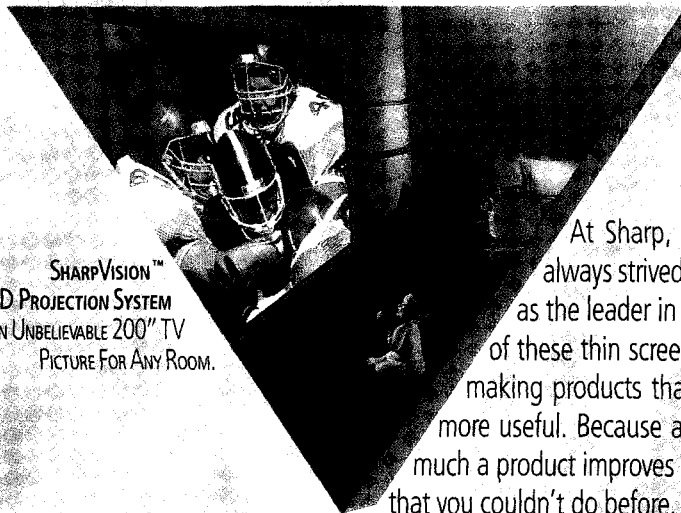
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EDGE OF NIGHT LIFE

I KNOW what *I* do when it's too darn hot," wailed the ex-chorus boy working 46th Street. "I indulge in my refreshing passion for Film and Theatre." Luckily, not many passersby were paying attention, because, from the looks on their faces, anyone even jokingly singing "Having a Heat Wave" in late July was looking to get pasted in the mouth. People were so overcome by the summer's second series of scorchers that they acted like Parisians in August: they disappeared. By midnight, Universal Grill and Fuddruckers had their chairs up. The multiplex on Broadway and 19th was half empty. There wasn't a pooch on the street. But since most New Yorkers take vacations during the real dog days this month, they had to be out there somewhere.

They were. Ranks of perspirers stood just off Sheridan Square watching Ron Howard shoot his new movie, "The Paper," with Michael Keaton and Marisa Tomei. Collective body heat and day-for-night lights made the air even toastier, but no one moved when Howard said "Action." (Whenever Tomei raised her voice, an adoring Cousin Vinny type would shake his head and say, "I love huh.") And up at USA (218 West 47th Street) a crowd as mixed in age, race, and orientation as you would find at an Earth Day rally screamed "Shanté!" louder than RuPaul to raise money for Wigstock. (Whenever RuPaul sang "Work," an adoring Cousin Vinny type would shake his head and say, "I love huh.") Times Square was suddenly at peace. Film and Theatre is so refreshing.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY—
PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

P.S. 122—The comedy troupe Hot Peaches in "Not Up to Snuff," which involves transvestites, Russian émigrés, government repression, and other matters, no doubt. (Aug. 19-22 and Aug. 26-29 at 7:30. Through Sept. 12.) ... ¶ James Adlesic presents a new solo dance piece, "Blue," as well as "Black & White," a duet with Niles Ford. (Aug. 19-22 at 9.) ... ¶ North Carolina native Mark Dendy in "Bus Ride to Heaven," a one-man show whose cast of characters includes a sixty-eight-year-old murderer named MeeMaw. (Aug. 20-21 and Aug. 27-28 at 10:30. Through Sept. 4.) ... ¶ Kate Bornstein in a new performance piece, "The Opposite Sex ... Is Neither!" (Aug. 26-29 at 9.) (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

LINCOLN CENTER OUT-OF-DOORS—A partial schedule: Aug. 18 at 8:15: Philadanco. ... ¶ Aug. 19 at 6: Relâche (contemporary music). ... ¶ Aug. 20 at 7: Jazz from Philadelphia, including guitarist Jim Dragoni and bagpiper Rufus Harley. ... ¶ Aug. 21 at 6:30: Corazón al Sur (traditional Latin-American songs). ... At 8: Latin music, Philadelphia style. ... ¶ Aug. 22 at 2:30: Flamenco Latino. ... At 8:15: Pianists Ahmad Jamal and Don Pullen. ... ¶ Aug. 23, from 6 to 10: The Roots of American Music Festival, with Dave Van Ronk and the Kingston Trio. ... ¶ Aug. 24, from 7 to 10:30: The Roots Festival continues, with Hazel Dickens and Bill Monroe & the Blue Grass Boys. (All events will take place in the environs of Lincoln Center. 875-5400. No tickets necessary.)

ART

Southampton Light

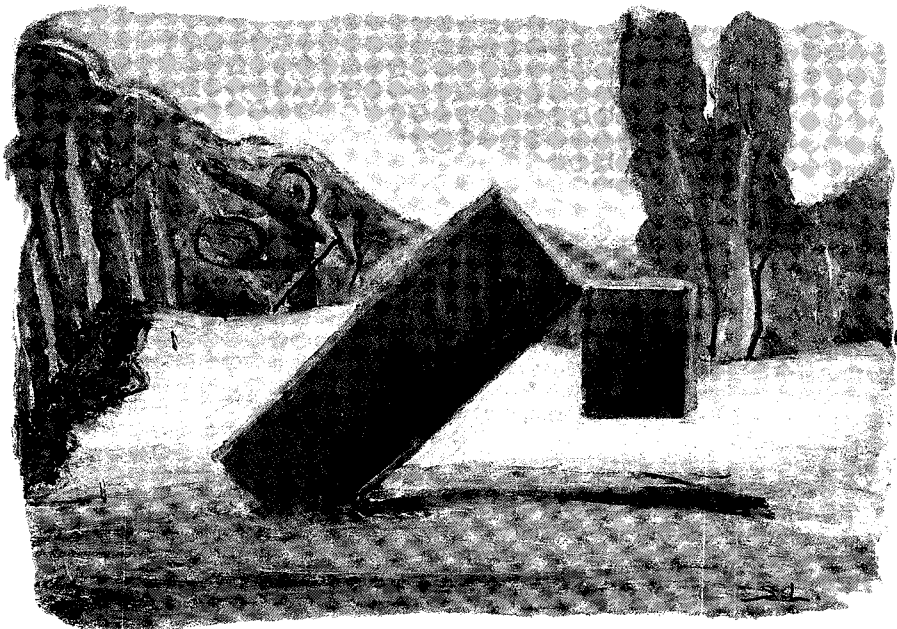
FAIRFIELD PORTER (1907-75), a great late bloomer in both painting and art criticism, did not have to work for a living and had plenty of time to think. Born in Winnetka, Illinois, and educated at Harvard, which did not then offer studio courses, he spent the next twenty years learning to paint, mostly on his own. By all accounts, Porter was modest, even unsure, about his ability as an artist, and yet his first big eureka was the realization that there was no one in America to teach him what he wanted to know.

The bracing, lucid Porter retrospective at the Parrish Museum, in Southampton (through September 12), makes it apparent that Porter's important "teachers" were Velázquez (the sense of objective distance), Bonnard and Vuillard (the feeling of physical unity and intimacy), and his friend de Kooning (the material independence of paint). But Porter's leap into painterly light did not occur until he was in his forties, after he moved to Southampton and began to write art criticism. It is a leap made explicit in the transition between the earlier still-lives, which are sensitive and murky and suggestive of both Chardin and early Johns, and a painting such as "Laurence Typing," dating from 1952, in which the basic Porteresque equation, paint + light = reality, is revealed. Over the next two and a half decades, mostly on Long Island and in Maine, Porter painted the scenes and people closest to him with this abstract verity in mind. His best works are brilliant studies in immediacy, in which the present seems to become the past right before your eyes.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Abstract Expressionism: Works on Paper, Selections from the Collection" begins with works from the mid-thirties and early forties, when the movement hadn't yet taken shape or been named, and it leaves off with a few eclectic pieces from the mid-sixties, when the style itself had already filtered down through three generations. Highlights include exquisite early drawings by Barnett Newman, surprisingly intense work by de Kooning, and paintings by William Bazotes that should revive his reputation as a colorist. Several lesser-known practitioners also flourish on paper, most notably Anne Ryan, Jerome Kamrowski, and Philip Guston. Through Sept. 12. ... ¶ Verrocchio's magnificent sculpture "Christ and St. Thomas," a recently restored Medici commission completed in 1483, is currently on display (it's normally on view in a granary-cum-oratory in Florence). ... ¶ An exhibition of historic hand-colored baseball cards. ... ¶ Forty examples of Persian tiles, from the twelfth century through the late nineteenth, in a snug, one-room exhibit. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.) ... **NOTE:** The roof garden, featuring six large sculptures, a great view, and cappuccino, is open when weather permits.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St.—"Latin-American Artists of the Twentieth Century" includes more than ninety artists, most notably Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), a lively Cubo-Surrealist painter from Brazil, and Jesús Rafael Soto, the Venezuelan whose brilliant Op constructions, famous during the sixties, seem timely again. The younger generation, including Julio Galán and Guillermo Kuitca, is especially strong. Through Sept. 7. ... ¶ "Pastime in Prints," very much a summer show, includes more than seventy depictions of leisure and outdoor activity by fifty artists, from Degas to Picasso to Hopper. Through Sept. 28. ... ¶ "Multiple Images: Photographs Since 1965 from the Collection" features work by Jan Groover, Sol LeWitt, Duane Michals, and Charles Ray. Through Sept. 28. ... ¶ Fifteen new large-scale linoleum-block prints by Chuck Close. Through Sept. 28. (Open daily, except Wednesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.) ... **NOTE:** The sculpture garden, at 14 W. 54th St., is open, free, on Fridays and Saturdays, from 6 to 10, with musical performances devoted to twentieth-century Latin America.



Menashe Kadishman's "Suspended" at the Storm King Art Center.

STEPHEN LACK

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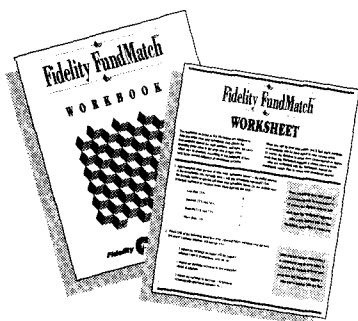
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ART—Cont'd

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—The museum presents Rebecca Horn, a German artist whose imaginative work incorporates all manner of objects, from flamingo feathers to violins to tap shoes—everything except old-fashioned oil on canvas. . . . ¶ Two floors below but light-years apart, "Modern Masterpieces from the Permanent Collection," which includes paintings by Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Mondrian, Miró, and Picasso, is reassuring evidence that fine art still lives. (Open daily, except Thursdays, 10 to 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM SoHo, 575 Broadway—More than seventy paintings, watercolors, drawings, and prints by Paul Klee (1879-1940). . . . ¶ "Singular Dimensions in Painting," an exhibit of minimalist work, primarily from the fifties and sixties. . . . ¶ A site-specific installation by Rebecca Horn. (Open daily, except Tuesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday through Saturday evenings until 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Hand-Painted Pop" includes early works by Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol, and Rosenquist, and such less well known artists as Jean Follett and Jess. . . . ¶ "In the Spirit of Fluxus," a carefully thought-out and handsomely installed exhibition of art and incunabula by the far-flung practitioners of this international neo-Dada non-movement. . . . ¶ "Hopper in Paris" consists of twenty-five works that Hopper painted in the early nineteen-hundreds. Through Sept. 19. . . . ¶ "The Subject of Rape," an installation. Through Aug. 29. . . . ¶ "Abject Art." Through Aug. 29. (Open Wednesdays and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, Central Park W. at 79th St.—"The Hall of Human Biology and Evolution," a new permanent exhibition. . . . ¶ "The Dinosaurs of Jurassic Park" features several life-size props created for Steven Spielberg, including a Tyrannosaurus rex, a triceratops, and a velociraptor. Through Sept. 12. . . . ¶ "Bears: Imagination and Reality" . . . ¶ More than fifty color photographs examining "The Pantanal: Brazil's Forgotten Wilderness," a floodplain "the size of Wyoming," home to rare and endangered animal and plant species. Through Aug. 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM, Eastern Parkway—"The Second Dimension: Twentieth-Century Sculptors' Drawings." More than seventy-five works from the museum's permanent collection, including figure drawings by Louise Nevelson and Isamu Noguchi. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM, 40 W. 53rd St.—"Gertrud and Otto Natzler: Collaboration/Solitude." The Natzlers were ceramists who emigrated from Vienna to Los Angeles in 1938. She made the sensual forms, he did the handsome glazes, and together they created such a perfect marriage of shape and surface that the pots in this retrospective seem to have sprung into being fully formed. The Natzlers' work is tremendously diverse—from sexy and delicate to lavalike and earthy—but it is all unmistak-

ably modern and functional. . . . ¶ In the fifties, Paul Soldner helped develop a kind of equivalent in clay of the muscularity of Abstract Expressionist painting. Soldner, who is also the subject of a retrospective here, is credited with creating an American version of raku, a low-fire, quick-cool Japanese process. His work, especially that of the last decade, is big, heavy, and highly sculptural. Through Sept. 5. . . . ¶ "John Cage: Edible Drawings." A small show of the late composer's works on handmade paper, manufactured from health food: Hijiki seaweed, bitter melon, wild plants, and medicines from Chinatown. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 8; Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

COOPER-HEWITT MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 91st St.—"Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office." (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

ISAMU NOGUCHI GARDEN MUSEUM, 32-37 Vernon Blvd., at 33rd Rd., Long Island City—Works from every period of the sculptor's life (1904-1988) are installed in a garden and open-air galleries carved from, and added to, an old photo-engraving factory. While it's all of interest—early gold-plated brass works, cast-bronze models for unrealized playgrounds, Japanese paper lanterns adapted for elec-

MUSEUM FOR AFRICAN ART, 593 Broadway—"Home and the World: Architectural Sculpture by Aboudramane and Bodys Isek Kingelez." Aboudramane, who hails from the Ivory Coast but lives in Paris, creates bright-colored, often fantastical structures—one of his buildings has horns. Kingelez, who is from Zaire, combines urban African design with international architecture. Through Sept. 26. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 11 to 8.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"American Treasures." Nineteenth-century paintings from the museum's permanent collection. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART, Flushing Meadow Park—"Ante América" ("Regarding America"). . . . ¶ Ten works by Keith Haring. Through Aug. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

OTHER VENUES

PASTORAL MIRAGE—Brooklyn's Prospect Park is both the subject and the site of an installation by the sculptor David Schafer. His fourteen neon-yellow billboards, mounted on

posts around the park, feature excerpts from the writings of Frederick Law Olmsted, the park's designer. The black text of each numbered piece reflects upon the vista it disturbs. Inside the park's edge, near Grand Army Plaza, for example, a portion of sign No. 5 reads, "At a short distance from the principal entrance, the course of the walks is designed to invite dispersion . . . and to aid in inducing a feeling of security and of freedom from the hurry, bustling and watchfulness necessary to safety while walking in the streets of the city." Other signs present Olmsted's meditations on park-design concepts such as spectacle, comfort, and bosage.

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK—The work of fifty New York artists is on display in the biggest show ever at this riverfront lot in Long Island City, approximately across the East River from Gracie Mansion. The work ranges from sinister (Itty Neuhau's black net draped over street lights) and sly (Gregg LeFevre's gourds hanging in a tree) to funny (Kurt Novak's giant pink mama kangaroo) and fragrant (Antoinette Ayres' ten-foot-high beehive tomb). The structural-steel sculptures of the park's founder, Mark di Suvero, anchor it all against the Manhattan skyline. (Ver-

non Boulevard at Broadway.)

STORM KING ART CENTER—The center this year celebrates the acquisition of Siah Armajani's "Gazebo for Two Anarchists: Gabriella Antolini and Alberto Antolini." Visitors can perch on the huge steel sculpture's open bridge, overlooking a gully, or gaze out at the hills from two cell-like gazebos. Massive abstract steel sculptures by Menashe Kadishman, Mark di Suvero, and Richard Serra, among others, dominate the four hundred acres of woods, hills, and gardens. Isamu Noguchi's brilliant "Momo Taro," forty tons of granite perfectly placed on the grassy cap of a smooth hill, is reason enough to visit. (Mountainville, New York. 1-914 534-3115. Open daily, 11 to 5:30.)



Paul Klee at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo.

tricity—stone is at the core. The names of the stones alone are sensuous—jasper, serpentine, Languedoc marble, red Persian travertine—and they rise among the birches, ivy, brick, and steel of Queens like indigenous art, like relics of civilization. (Open Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM, 1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd St.—"From the Inside Out" showcases eight contemporary international artists, including Christian Boltanski and Nancy Spero. . . . ¶ Prints, drawings, and other works on paper in "Collecting for the Twenty-first Century: Recent Acquisitions and Promised Gifts." Through Sept. 12. (Open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 to 5:45; Tuesdays, 11 to 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

American Daydream

CURATORIAL imagination and some interesting connections between certain photographers are what make "Daydream Nation," at Luhring Augustine (130 Prince Street; through August 27), stand out. All the photographers here—William Eggleston, Cindy Sherman, Gregory Crewdson, Hiroshi Sugimoto, O. Winston Link, and Philip-Lorca di Corcia—have been seen before, as have many of the images. In fact, the exhibition has a sort of summer-roundup feel to it. But new work isn't the point: this show is about the way these disparate images speak to each other.

Most of the photographs address American fantasies relating to glamour and romance—both the underside of it and the public iconography. Sugimoto's images of what appear to be empty movie screens are very different from Sherman's shots of herself done up as the type of movie star who might be on those screens, but here it is possible to see the affinities between the two bodies of work. Crewdson's make-believe shots of the suburbs, which bring out the artificial element in suburban existence, contrast with Eggleston's views of Southern life, but both photographers achieve a kind of surrealism that's riveting, because it's a form of realism. Link's romantic train photographs from the fifties have the opposite aura of di Corcia's clever, commercial-feeling nineties images of male hustlers, but both photographers used staging. Their works here seem like different tableaux in the same story about industrialization.

FRANCOIS KOLLAR—Through Sept. 18. (Zabriskie, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

MARGARET MORTON/SKEET MCAULEY—Morton's black-and-white photographs of shanties in New York capture the architectural resourcefulness of the men and women who built them. In her pictures, rubble and discarded wood can be as powerful as marble. / McAuley takes huge color shots of oasis-like golf courses in the arid Southwest. Through Sept. 4. (Lowinsky, 575 Broadway.)

MINAYOSHI TAKADA—Twenty-six lushly textured vintage prints from 1947 to 1950. Through Sept. 10. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St.—"Outside the Dream: Child Poverty in America." Seventy black-and-white works by photojournalist Stephen Shames. . . . Collaborative Polaroids by artists and teen-agers from New York City. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY MIDTOWN, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St.—Opening-night, backstage, and production shots since 1893, celebrating Broadway's hundredth anniversary. Playwrights, stars, and composers include Tennessee Williams, Al Jolson, Fred Astaire, and George Gershwin. . . . Fifty photographs by Rick Smolan that incorporate advanced interactive digital technology to document a journey through the Australian outback. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

MUSIC

Interlude

WHAT used to be classical music's off-season has long since shriveled into two short lulls, hesitations during which orchestras and institutions assume and then shed their summer configurations. A musical time-traveller from the nineteen-fifties visiting Manhattan this year could have recognized summer only by the heat and the white dinner jackets: here was the New York Philharmonic playing Brahms and Schumann at Carnegie; the traveller would have been surprised to find Lincoln Center but would have felt right at home with the offerings of Mostly Mozart and the City Opera. We're heading into the second lull just now: the out-of-town festivals are winding down and serving pops concerts for dessert, and the City Opera is putting up another of its operettas (fifteen performances of "The Student Prince," with some nice new voices in its comforting tunes). Mostly Mozart is closing on August 20 and 21 with Cecilia Bartoli—a marvellous artist, who, if she doesn't watch out, will find herself still inexperienced and already overexposed. The program includes the motet "Exsultate, jubilate," definitely overexposed, but at least the combination of music and singer is promisingly fresh.

IN TOWN—OPERA

NEW YORK CITY OPERA—Presenting "The Student Prince," by Sigmund Romberg. (Aug. 18-20 and Aug. 24-27 at 8; Aug. 21 and Aug. 28 at 1:30 and 8; and Aug. 22 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre, 870-5570. The company's season resumes on Sept. 9.)

"THE MIKADO"—An hour of highlights from the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, featuring mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle and baritone James Billings. (Tobin Plaza, World Trade Center, Aug. 23 at 12:15. No tickets necessary.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA—"Madama Butterfly," fully staged, with Vincent La Selva conducting. (Lerner Auditorium, Dreiser Community Center, Co-op City, the Bronx, Aug. 25 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

IN TOWN—ORCHESTRAS

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL—Final performances of the season. Aug. 18: Gerard Schwarz conducts the Festival Orchestra in Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (featuring Eugene Istomin), and Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 2 (with Cho-Liang Lin) and Symphony No. 35 (the "Haffner"). . . . **NOTE:** In a pre-concert recital, beginning at 7 and open to ticket holders, Mr. Istomin will perform Beethoven's Sonata in C-Sharp Minor (Op. 27, No. 2, the "Moonlight") and G-Minor Fantasia (Op. 77). . . . Aug. 20-21: Gerard Schwarz conducts the Festival Orchestra in Mozart's Symphonies No. 28 and No. 39; the motet "Exsultate, jubilate" and arias from "Davidde Penitente" and "La Clemenza di Tito," featuring mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli; and David Diamond's orchestrations of Debussy's "Hommage à Haydn" and Ravel's "Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn," both of which were originally published as piano works, in 1909. . . . **NOTE:** In pre-concert recitals, beginning both evenings at 7 and open to ticket holders, duo-pianists Bradshaw and

Buono will perform eleven Schubert Ländler (as arranged by Brahms), Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" (arranged by Ravel), and their own adaptation of Strauss's "Rosenkavalier" Waltzes. (Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030. Evenings at 8.)

NEW AMSTERDAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA—Stephen Rogers Radcliffe conducts Rossini's "La Scala di Seta" Overture, Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," and Mozart's Symphony No. 40. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. Aug. 26 at 7:30. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

IN TOWN—RECITALS

ALAN GAMPEL—In his New York recital début, the pianist performs Schubert's Four Impromptus (D. 899), Schumann's "Faschingsschwank aus Wien," the American premiere of François Serrette's "Zorn Rhapsody," Scriabin's Fantasy Sonata No. 2, and Chopin's "Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano.'" (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Aug. 18 at 5:45.)

BARGEMUSIC—Aug. 19 at 7:30 and Aug. 22 at 4: An all-Brahms concert, comprising his C-Minor Trio (Op. 101), A-Major Piano Quartet (Op. 26), and G-Major String Quintet (Op. 111). . . . Aug. 26 at 7:30 and Aug. 29 at 4: Presenting Mendelssohn's F-Minor Piano Quartet (Op. 2), Mozart's Horn Quintet, and Dvořák's A-Major Piano Quintet (Op. 81). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061.)

SUMMERGARDEN—Concluding concerts in the Museum of Modern Art's summer survey of twentieth-century Latin-American music. Aug. 20-21: Music for flute and guitar, featuring Susan Glaser and Kevin Gallagher, respectively; including works by Villa-Lobos (from Brazil), Leo Brouwer (Cuba), Benjamin Gutiérrez (Costa Rica), Francis Schwartz (Puerto Rico), Astor Piazzolla (Argentina), and a trio of Venezuelans (Alfredo del Mónaco, Antonio Lauro, and Adina Izarra). . . . Aug. 27-28: The Belvoir String Quartet performs works by Silvestre Revueltas (Mexico), Mario Lavista (Mexico), Julián Orbón (Cuba), Aurelio Tello (Peru), and Alberto Ginastera (the Quartet No. 3 by this late dean of Argentine composers, with the vocal part supplied by soprano Cheryl Marshall). (Sculpture Garden, 14 W. 54th St. Evenings at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

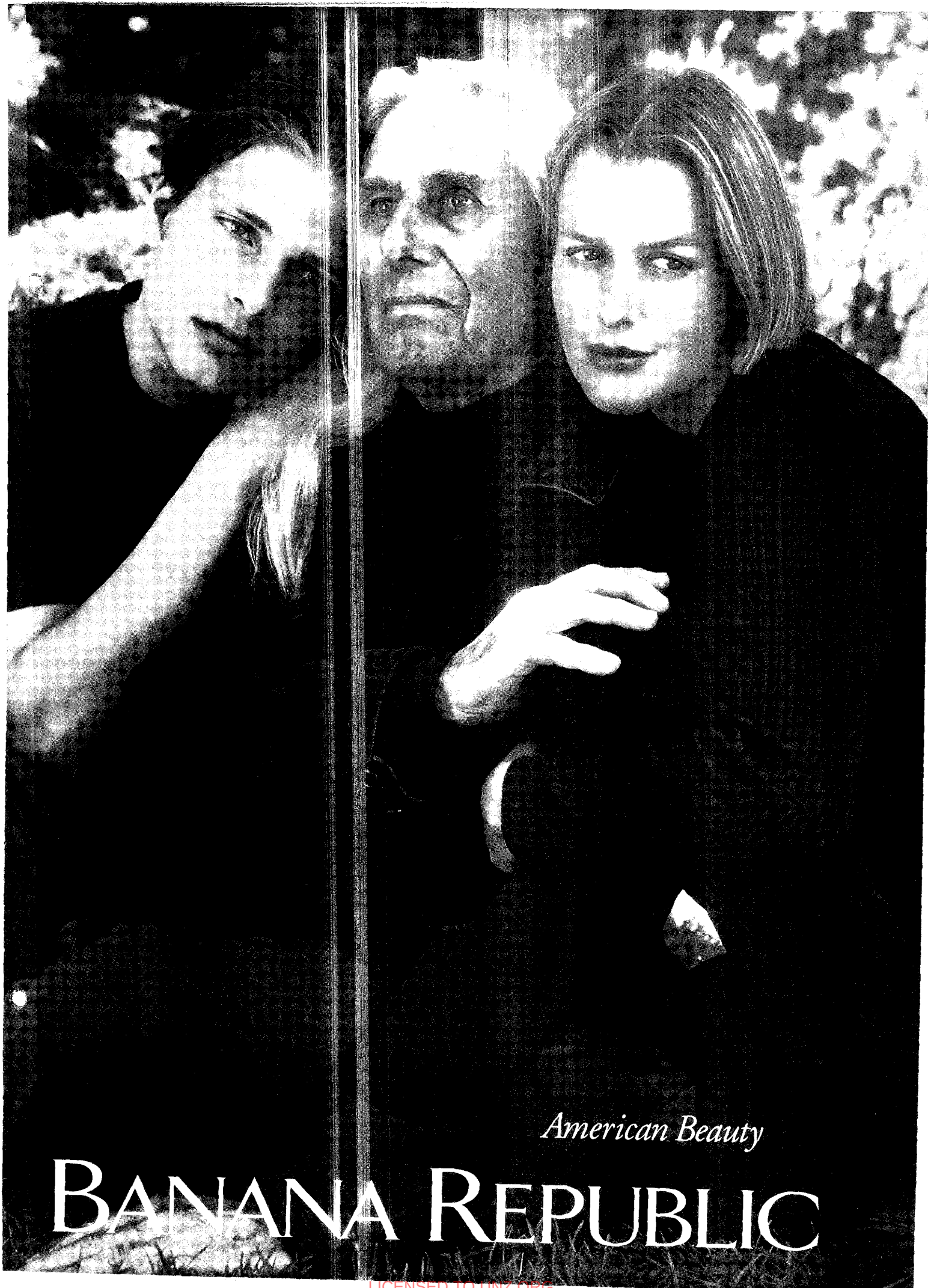
ISLAND MUSIC—A weekly early-music series, far from the madding crowd. Aug. 22 at 11:30 A.M.: Eric Grossman (Baroque violin) and Ilan Rechtman (harpsichord) conclude their traversal of Bach's violin-and-keyboard sonatas. . . . Aug. 29 at 11:30 A.M.: Mr. Rechtman offers a program of Scarlatti sonatas. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. For information, call 222-5762.)

BRONX ARTS ENSEMBLE—Presenting chamber works by Beethoven, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Milhaud, as well as Pauline Viardot-García's vocal adaptations of two Chopin mazurkas (here featuring soprano Josephine Mongiardo). (Rockwood Drive Circle, Van Cortlandt Park, the Bronx, Aug. 22 at 2. . . . McGinley Center, Fordham University, Bronx Rose Hill Campus, Aug. 22 at 4. No tickets necessary for either concert.)

TEATIME CHAMBER MUSIC—Salon concerts in the Hotel Wales' Pied Piper Room. Aug. 22 at 6: Triplet (a double-reed trio, comprising two oboes and a bassoon) plays Beethoven's "Variations on Mozart's 'Là ci darem la mano'"; harpist Park Stickney offers works by Britten and others. . . . Aug. 29 at 6: Stephen Starkman conducts members of the Cosmopolitan Chamber Players in Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat," with Michael Dash as narrator. (Madison Ave. at 92nd St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 876-6000.) . . . **NOTE:** Mr. Stickney can also be heard during the hotel's daily teatime, from 5 to 6 on weekday afternoons.

LIONIZING LENNY—New York's love affair with Leonard Bernstein continues at full throttle. The composer, pianist, and onetime music





American Beauty

BANANA REPUBLIC

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MUSIC—Cont'd

director of the New York Philharmonic would have celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday on Aug. 25; but because he died nearly three years ago, his adopted city will just have to celebrate it without him. This it will do in fine style. Aug. 25 at 5:45: A new street sign will be unveiled designating the block of W. 65th St. between Broadway and Amsterdam Ave. as Leonard Bernstein Place. Not "A Quiet Place," to be sure, but a gesture richly deserved all the same. Ceremonialists should gather at the northwest corner of Broadway and 65th St. ... At 7: A wide-ranging, all-Bernstein musicale, featuring twenty-five per-



Manuel Barrueco at Caramoor.

formers of such lustre that one cannot begin to name names. (Alice Tully Hall. A limited number of tickets—all free—will be available to the public at the hall's box office, beginning at 11 A.M. on the day of the concert. Those who don't get tickets can watch the proceedings on an enormous television screen that will be stationed in Lincoln Center's Fountain Plaza.) ... Aug. 27 at 12:30: Vocal and instrumental chamber works by Bernstein, performed by mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle, baritone Kurt Ollman, cellist Alexis Gerlach, and pianist Shu-Ching Chen. (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, the concert will be performed on Aug. 30 at noon.)

OUT OF TOWN

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL—The second of two Dvořák weekends, with lectures and panel discussions interspersed among the concerts. Aug. 20 at 8: The Brentano String Quartet plays quartets by Vítězslav Novák, Smetana, and Dvořák (his Fourteenth). ... Aug. 21 at 1: Vocal and piano works that draw on folk-music sources, by ten Czech and American composers. ... At 8: Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra in musical curiosities: Dvořák's symphonic poems "Noon Witch" and "The Golden Spinning Wheel," as well as his orchestral arrangement of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home," Rubin Goldmark's "Requiem" (an orchestral work inspired by Lincoln's Gettysburg Address), and George Chadwick's Symphony No. 3. ... Aug. 22 at 1: Chamber music by Dvořák. ... At 4:30: Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra and soloists in Dvořák's Requiem. (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson. For information about tickets, call 1-914 758-7559.)

CARAMOOR MUSIC FESTIVAL—Aug. 20 at 8:30: Classical guitarist Manuel Barrueco plays works by Sylvius Leopold Weiss, Fernando Sor, Lou Harrison, Chick Corea, Joaquín Rodrigo, and Isaac Albéniz. ... Aug. 21 at 8:30:

Mark Niehaus leads the New York Big Brass in works by Giovanni Gabrieli, Prokofiev, Bernstein, and others. ... Aug. 22 at 5:30: The Orchestra of St. Luke's plays Bach's six "Brandenburg" Concertos. (Katonah, N.Y. 1-914 232-1252.)

TANGLEWOOD—Final classical concerts of the season, with some of Tanglewood's Festival of Contemporary Music events (featuring fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center) interspersed among the main-series concerts. Aug. 20 at 8:30: Simon Rattle conducts the Boston Symphony in Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" Overture, Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 (featuring Emanuel Ax), and Elgar's "Enigma Variations." ... Aug. 21 at 8:30:

Christoph Eschenbach conducts the Boston Symphony in Verdi's "La Forza del Destino" Overture, Barber's Violin Concerto (with Gil Shaham), and Dvořák's Symphony No. 8. ... Aug. 22 at 2:30: Christoph Eschenbach conducts the Boston Symphony in Mozart's Overture to "The Magic Flute," A-Major Piano Concerto (K. 488, with the conductor doubling as soloist), and Symphony No. 41. ... At 8:30: Music by Peter

Lieberson, Eric Zivian, Henze, Robert Zuidam, Edmund Campion, and Theo Verhey. ... Aug. 23 at 8:30: Works by Julian Anderson, John Adams (his Chamber Symphony), Joan Huang, and Schoenberg (his "Kammersymphonie"). ... Aug. 24 at 8:30: Harold Rosenbaum directs the New York Virtuoso Singers in works by David Lang, Stockhausen, Henze, Rorem, Perle, and Dallapiccola. ... Aug. 25 at 8:30: Works by Oliver Knussen, Busoni, Armand Qualliotine, and Stockhausen (his "Gruppen"). ... Aug. 26 at 8:30: Mozart's C-Minor Fugue (K. 426, for two pianos), Debussy's six "Epigraphes Antiques" (for piano, four hands), and the United States premiere of Peter Lieberson's "King Gesar" (for narrator and chamber ensemble); with speaker Omar Ebrahim, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and pianists Peter Serkin and Emanuel Ax. ... Aug. 27 at 8:30: Marek Janowski conducts the Boston Symphony in Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Horacio Gutiérrez), Richard Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks," and Johann Strauss, Jr.'s "Emperor Waltzes." ... Aug. 28 at 8:30: John Williams conducts the Boston Symphony in Michael Tippett's "Suite for the Birthday of Prince Charles," Elgar's Cello Concerto (with Yo-Yo Ma), and Bernstein's "Hail!" (featuring flutist Leone Buyse) and "Symphonic Dances from 'West Side Story.'" ... Aug. 29 at 2:30: Marek Janowski conducts the Boston Symphony in Beethoven's Violin Concerto (with Frank Peter Zimmermann) and Symphony No. 3. ... Aug. 31 at 8:30: John Williams conducts the Boston Pops in his own movie music. (Lenox, Mass. For information about tickets, call 1-413 637-1940.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS—Final concerts of the season. Aug. 22 at 3: The Composers String Quartet plays Beethoven's C-Sharp-Minor Quartet (Op. 131) and Roger Sessions' Quartet No. 2. ... Aug. 29 at 3: The Borromeo String Quartet performs Beethoven's Quartets in A Major (Op. 18, No. 5) and in C Major (Op. 59, No. 3), as well as Leon

Kirchner's Quartet No. 1. (Woodstock, N.Y. For information about tickets, call 1-914 679-8217.)

JAZZ/POP/ROCK
PERSONAL APPEARANCES

STEELY DAN—At the height of its success in the seventies, Steely Dan was a lot closer in spirit to a consortium than to a rock band. Songwriters Donald Fagen and Walter Becker spent most of their time in the recording studio, agonizing over every nuance, with a rotating cast of jazz and session musicians. Their infamous perfectionism and reclusiveness became the stuff of music-business legend—as did their antipathy to live performance. After they split up, in 1980, it seemed as if Fagen and Becker might happily never tour again. Which is why Steely Dan's first tour in nineteen years is big news indeed. "Kamakiriad," Fagen's new solo record, is the catalyst for this sudden activity. It's a far cry from the grandeur of "Aja," but after nineteen years any excuse will do. The band's present incarnation, which features jazz heavies Warren Bernhardt on piano and Peter Erskine on drums, is like something reanimated after years in amber—slow moving, a little unsure of the local customs, and potentially ferocious. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. Aug. 18 at 8. ... Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. Aug. 24-25 at 8. ... Meadowslands Arena. 1-201 935-3900. Aug. 27 at 8.)

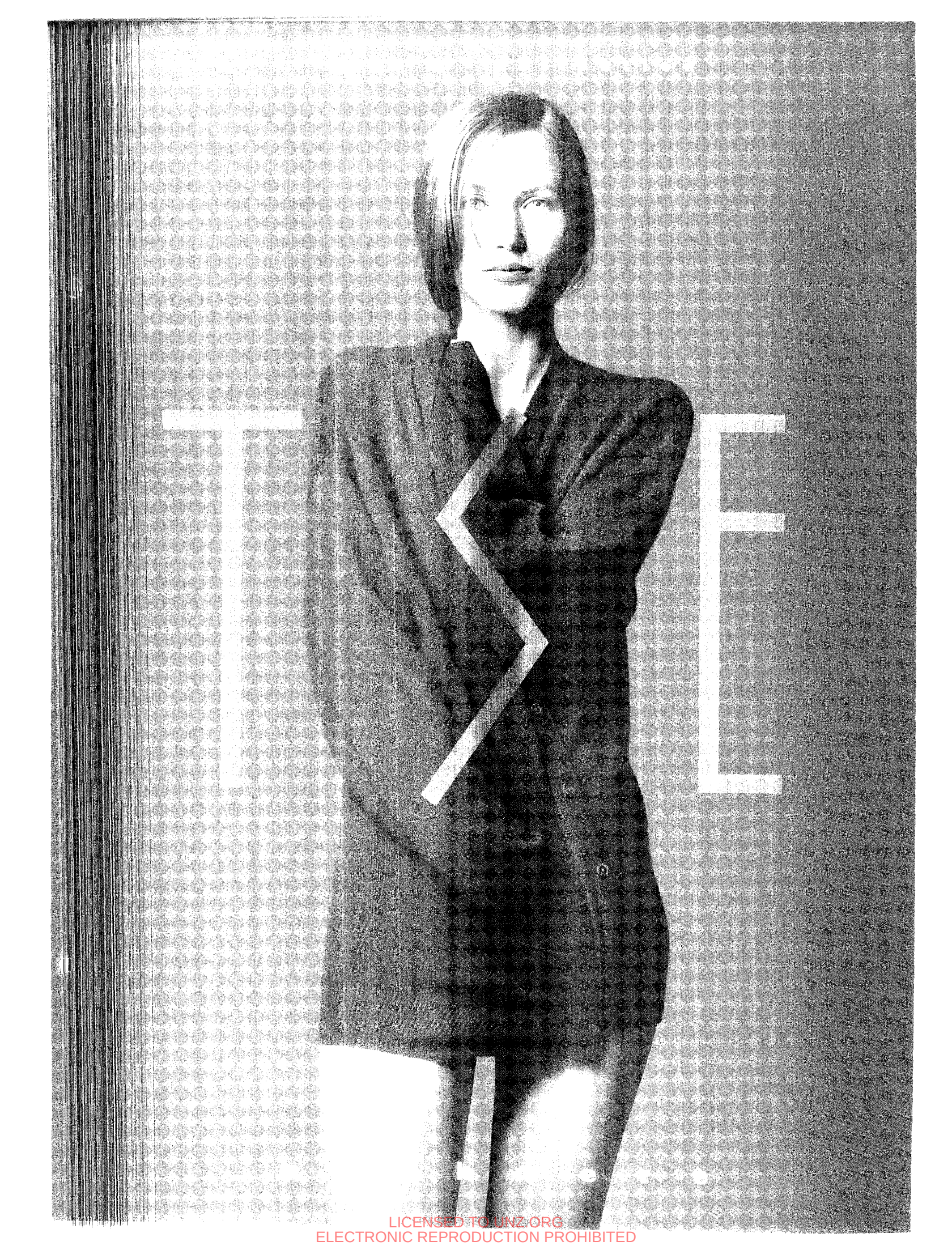
PHRANC—"Cracklin' Rosie, get on board!" Phranc, a self-described "average, all-American Jewish lesbian folksinger" who abandoned punk for acoustic folksinging, will do a totally, well, straight set of such Neil Diamond classics as "Cherry, Cherry" and "I Am...I Said." Anything else you need to know? (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Aug. 18-21 and Aug. 24-28 at 8.)

MIDNIGHT OIL—Some people wanna fill the world with silly love songs, but Peter Garrett, who fronts the rock band Midnight Oil, would rather sing about the repression of Aboriginal Australians. Not that the Oils, as their fans call the Aussie rockers, have anything against a pretty pop hook. On their latest album, "Earth and Sun and Moon," the group offers four-minute discourses on politics and the environment that you can hum along to, and even dance to. Midnight Oil will showcase these ditties, as well as older material in a similar vein, when it plays at Jones Beach. Opening the show: the Irish band Hothouse Flowers, which plays lyrical, soulful rock and roll, and the charming second-generation reggae outfit Ziggy Marley & the Melody Makers. (Jones Beach Theatre. Aug. 21 at 8.)

BILL MONROE AND THE BLUE GRASS BOYS—There are only a handful of musicians still around who in performance elicit a sense of deep history, a feeling that you're in the presence of pure American greatness. Eighty-one-year-old mandolinist and singer Bill Monroe fashioned modern bluegrass out of traditional elements as old as the country itself. The high, keening vocal harmonies, dervish instrumental breaks, and delicate weave of guitar, fiddle, and banjo that are the signature of bluegrass all came together in Monroe's early editions of the Blue Grass Boys. (Flatt and Scruggs were among the group's distinguished alumni.) Contemporary bluegrass, with its self-conscious virtuosity and sometimes frantic hootin' and hollerin', can seem frivolous; Monroe's version is still dark, mysterious, and beautiful. He is the roots. (Damosch Park Bandshell, Lincoln Center. Aug. 24 at 9:30. No tickets necessary.)

THE BEACH BOYS—God only knows just how many times during the past thirty years even the staunchest Beach Boys supporters have anticipated the big wipeout, but the quintessential California pop band has been stubbornly hanging ten long enough to be entering its fourth decade. Former leader

WARREN LUNN



T E

MUSIC—Cont'd

Brian Wilson's long-term emotional troubles and drummer Dennis Wilson's ironic death by drowning created the kind of undertow that would have carried most rock groups out to sea. But with eternal party animal Mike Love cheerleading audiences through the band's countless hits (all of which can be heard on their remarkable new boxed-set retrospective), and youngest brother Carl Wilson onstage to protect and defend Brian's musical legacy, the Beach Boys can still generate a whole mess of good vibrations—rain or shine. (Jones Beach Theatre, Aug. 28-29 at 8.)

NEIL YOUNG—Always one step ahead of grim predictability, this great heavy-metal folk-rocker has shed his latest skin—that of a wired, unplugged singer of meditative midlife ballads—and is back on the road with his mighty black electric Gibson, wailing away and singing epic American rock songs. The twist this time is his backup band: Booker T. and the MGs, the muscular and super-steady Memphis combo that served as the heart-beat of the Stax sound in the sixties and early seventies. They were the house band for Bob Dylan's thirtieth-anniversary concert last year at Madison Square Garden, and they backed up Young on a revelatory version of "All Along the Watchtower," the evening's best tribute to Dylan. (Young's guitar playing nearly summoned Hendrix back from the dead.) Listen for Booker T.'s organ riffs on Young's "Like a Hurricane" and Neil's quavering vocal take on "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay," which the MGs' guitarist Steve Cropper co-wrote with Otis Redding. (Jones Beach Theatre, Aug. 20 at 8.)

JIMMY BUFFETT—Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. Aug. 18 at 8.

RAUL JAURENA'S NEW YORK-BUENOS AIRES CONNECTION—Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9500. Aug. 19 at 7.

"INSPIRATIONS"—The series at the Brooklyn Museum continues, with the Jack DeJohnette trio considering the music of Miles Davis and John Coltrane. (Frieda Schiff Warburg Memorial Sculpture Garden, Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway. Aug. 22 at 3. Tickets at the museum on the day of the concert.)

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS—With The Band. (Jones Beach Theatre. Aug. 22 at 8.)

TEARS FOR FEARS—Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Aug. 24 at 8.

JETHRO TULL—With Procol Harum. (Jones Beach Theatre. Aug. 27 at 8.)

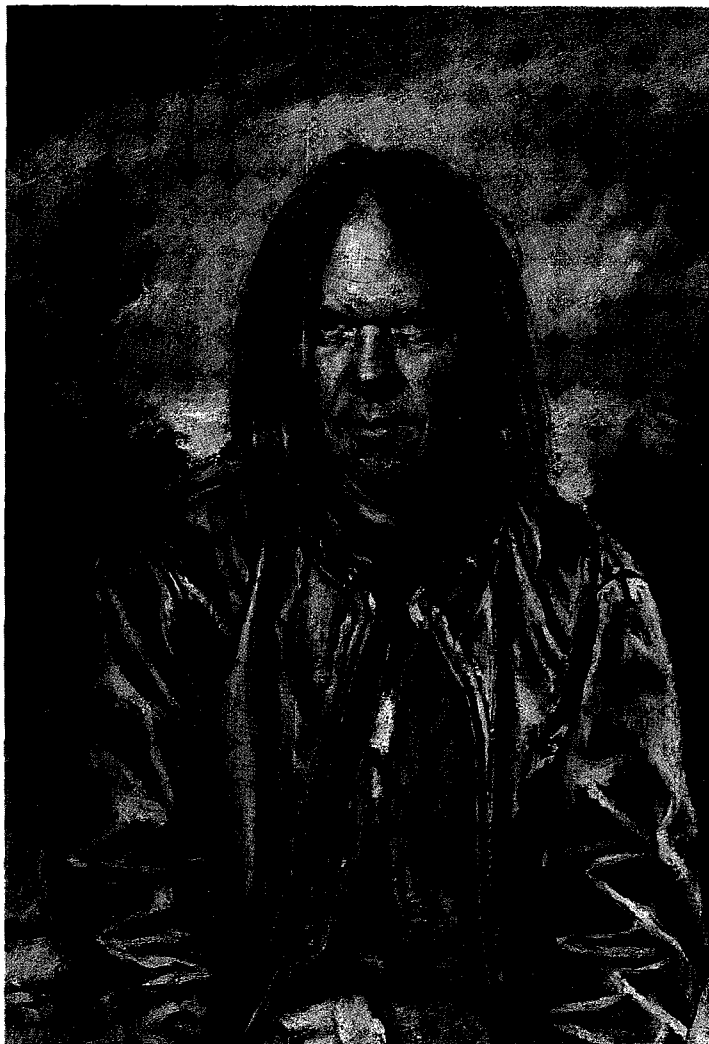
"SOUNDS AT SUNSET"—A series of concerts saluting Broadway. Aug. 24: Maureen Brennan and Francis Ruivivar, among others, sing Lerner & Loewe and Bock & Harnick. . . . Aug. 31: Liz Callaway, Terri Klausner, Alix Korey, Billy Porter, and Mr. Ruivivar sing the songs of Andrew Lloyd Webber and others. (Hudson River Park Pavilion. Concerts at 6:30. No tickets necessary.)

RIVERSIDE PARK ARTS FESTIVAL—Aug. 22: The Claudio Roditi quintet. . . . Aug. 29: The Jimmy Heath sextet, featuring Clark Terry and Slide Hampton, with Barry Harris, Ray Drummond, and Winard Harper. (Rotunda, W. 79th St. near the Boat Basin. Concerts at 4. No tickets necessary.)

SPORTS

Homage to Morrisania

MAYBE if George Steinbrenner knew that the Grand Concourse was modelled after the Champs-Élysées he'd have a higher opinion of the Bronx, from which he threatens to withdraw his baseball team when his lease on Yankee Stadium expires, at the end of the century. Rich people lived here in the early nineteen-hundreds, in fancy apartment buildings with gracious courtyards, across from a park where a fountain dedicated to Heinrich Heine



Neil Young at Jones Beach.

teems with sea imagery. It's all still here, under the litter and graffiti—except the rich people, of course—though the fountain is dry, and the mermaids have lost their heads.

This part of the Bronx, called Morrisania, after Gouverneur Morris, is on very high ground. Off 165th Street, around the corner from the Bronx Museum of the Arts and opposite St. Simeon's Episcopal Church (1906), a staircase rises to a street two stories up, like something you'd climb in Montmartre. From here

you can see the new mall, a few blocks east of the stadium, on 161st Street: it has a Waldbaum's, a multiplex cinema, and a food court—just like the suburbs. Nearby, on Morris Avenue, is a throw-back to pre-Frigidaire America: an ice-house, where you can buy ice in three-hundred-pound blocks.

The most historic building near the stadium is not the Bronx County Courthouse, with its friezes of working people, but the Concourse Plaza Hotel, where every Democratic Presidential candidate through Kennedy attended the Bronx Ladies' Democratic Club Lunch. Giants

slept here. Yankees, too. It's now a residence for senior citizens and the disabled. If you look around before a game, watch out for the senior citizens; there are some tough little old ladies in the Bronx.

HOME TEAMS

YANKEES—Vs. the Texas Rangers, Aug. 18 at 1. . . . Vs. the Kansas City Royals, Aug. 20 at 7:30 and Aug. 21-22 at 1:30. . . . Vs. the Chicago White Sox, Aug. 31 at 7:30.

METS—Vs. the Cincinnati Reds, Aug. 23-24 at 7:40 and Aug. 25 at 1:40. . . . Vs. the Colorado Rockies, Aug. 26-27 at 7:40, Aug. 28 at 7:10, and Aug. 29 at 3:10. . . . Vs. the Houston Astros, Aug. 30-31 at 7:40.

(The Yankees play at Yankee Stadium, 1-718 293-6000, and the Mets play at Shea Stadium, 1-718 507-8499.)

TENNIS

U.S. OPEN—The world's finest players take over the courts at the U.S.T.A. National Tennis Center, in Flushing Meadow, starting Aug. 30 and running through Sept. 12. (1-718 271-5100.)

ARTHUR ASHE TENNIS CHALLENGE—This AIDS-related fund-raising event features top pros and celebrity matches. Aug. 29, 12:30 to 3:30. (U.S.T.A. National Tennis Center, Flushing Meadow. 1-718 271-5100.)

REEBOK TENNIS FESTIVAL—Highlights include a ground-stroke target contest, a fast-serve contest, and an appearance by tennis great Rod Laver. Aug. 26, noon to 3. Rain date: Aug. 27 (World Financial Center, Battery Park City.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

FARM LIVIN' IS THE LIFE FOR ME—Let's say you've been growing tomatoes in your window box, and they're firm and tasty, as well as pleasing to the eye. You might just want to bring a few to the City Gardeners' Harvest Fair, on Aug. 21, where tomatoes, crookneck squash, snap beans, frying peppers, and several other city-grown vegetables, fruits, and flowers will be judged on their condition, quality, uniformity, and variety. The following day, amateur bands from Russia, the Czech Republic, and the United States will participate in the annual N.Y.C. Bluegrass Band & Banjo Contest. On both days, there will be hayrides, square dancing, and

JARRETT HUDDLESTON

4-H exhibits, as well as a variety of other rural activities. (Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn. Aug. 21-22, from 11 to 6. For more information, call 1-718 338-3799.)

TAP-O-MANIA—On Aug. 22 at noon, several thousand tap dancers—professional, amateur, and rank amateur—will demonstrate their hoofing techniques in front of Macy's, on 34th St. between Seventh Ave. and Broadway. For information on participating, call 560-4495.

MANHATTAN ISLAND SWIM—Leaving from Battery Park, on Aug. 21 at 10, eight participants, aided by the tide, will endeavor to swim a twenty-eight-and-a-half-mile route up the East River, across the Harlem, and down the Hudson. The swimmers, who hail from Germany, England, and Canada, as well as the United States, will be equipped with only regular swimsuits, goggles, and bathing caps. "Wetsuits are for wimps," says the race organizer, Morty Berger; he maintains that a little Vaseline or lanolin does the trick. As for the potential unsavoriness of the water, he claims that the quality has improved dramatically. Swimmers are not allowed to hold on to anything for the duration of the race, but each participant is assigned a boat manned with volunteers who will monitor progress, insure safety, and supply food and cheer. The winner is expected to reach Battery Park between 4:30 and 6; racers who have not completed the circuit by 8 will be pulled from the water.

GO NATIVE!—The New York Botanical Garden will focus on the eleven northeastern U.S. habitats: grasses, wildflowers, shrubs, and ferns in the two-and-a-half-acre Native Plant Garden. The meadow and prairie will be flaunting their brightest summer garb; experts, including a lepidopterist, will be available for tours and to answer questions. (Bronx Park. 1-718 817-8700. Aug. 21-22, from 11 to 4.)

SIMPLY CHIMING—As part of the free Dancing on the Plaza series, Lenny Cocco and the Chimes will play their fifties and sixties hits on Aug. 18, and Gary U.S. Bonds—whose hits span three decades and include "Quarter to Three" and "This Little Girl of Mine" (recorded with Bruce Springsteen)—will perform on Aug. 25. (World Financial Center, Battery Park City. Evenings from 7 to 9.)

GOOD VIBES—The Jazzmobile will present vibist Milt Jackson on Aug. 18 and drummer Roy Haynes on Aug. 25. Booths with African-American food and crafts will be set up. (Grant's Tomb, Riverside Dr. at 122nd St. Wednesdays, from 7 to 9. Through Sept. 1. No tickets necessary.)

QUOTIDIAN—Quentin Crisp and Mark O'Donnell, among several others, will read selections from other people's diaries. (Fez at Time Café, 380 Lafayette St. Aug. 24 at 9:30. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.)

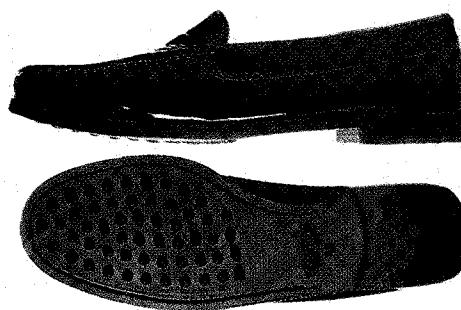
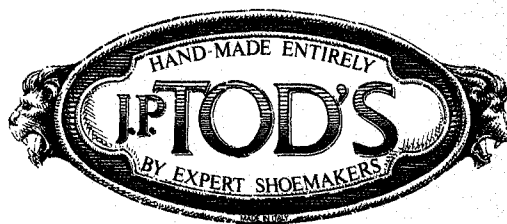
PIER & PARK PLAYS—Free outdoor theatre. The Kings County Shakespeare Company will present "Othello" at the Prospect Park Bandshell. (Aug. 19-29 at 8.) ... ¶ Rakka-Thamm! Theatre Company takes over the W. 10th St. pier for a production of Julie Bovasso's "Down by the River Where Waterlilies Are Disfigured Every Day." (Thursdays through Sundays at 7:30. No shows Aug. 21 and Aug. 23. Through Sept. 5.) ... ¶ Gorilla Rep will present its annual "Midsummer Night's Dream" in the southwest corner of Washington Square Park. (Aug. 20-21 and Aug. 28-29 at 8.)

TOURS & WALKS—Aug. 20 at 2: In preparation for the U.S. Open, the New York Hall of Science is offering a tour of the U.S.T.A. National Tennis Center. For more information, call 1-718 699-0005. ... ¶ Aug. 21 at 1: Big Onion and Radical Walking Tours will join together to offer a tour of lower Manhattan, from two different ideological viewpoints. For more information, call 439-1090. ... ¶ Aug. 22 at 11: Adventure on a Shoestring will guide visitors around City Island, a little piece of New England in the Bronx. For more information, call 265-2663. ... ¶ Aug. 28 at 1: Clap if you believe in ferries. Insider's New York will tour various terminals and piers in lower Manhattan. For more information, call 397-3809.



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EAST SIDE

ANGELIKA FILM CENTER, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000)
 Theatre 1: "Amongst Friends" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Much Ado About Nothing" (directed by Kenneth Branagh).
 Theatre 3: "Orlando" (Sally Potter).
 Theatre 4: "Especially on Sunday" (Marco Tullio Giordana, Giuseppe Bertolucci, and Giuseppe Tornatore; in Italian).
 Theatre 5: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau, in Spanish).
 Theatre 6: "The Wedding Banquet" (Ang Lee).
MOVELAND 8TH STREET TRIPLEX, 36 E. 8th. (477-6600)
 Theatre 1: "Manhattan Murder Mystery" (†).
 Theatre 2: Through Aug. 24: "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" (†). From Aug. 25: "Only the Strong" (Sheldon Lettich).
 Theatre 3: "The Secret Garden" (Agnieszka Holland, with Maggie Smith).
VILLAGE THEATRE VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th. (982-0400)
 Theatre 1: "The Fugitive" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Searching for Bobby Fischer" (Steven Zaillian).
 Theatre 3: "The Firm" (†).
 Theatre 4: Through Aug. 19: "The Fugitive" (†). From Aug. 20: "Wilder Napalm" (Glenn Gordon Caron).
 Theatre 5: "In the Line of Fire" (†).
 Theatre 6: (Matinées only) "Free Willy" (Simon Wincer); and (evenings only) "In the Line of Fire" (†).
 Theatre 7: "So I Married an Axe Murderer" (Thomas Schlamme, with Mike Myers).
CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th. (924-3363)
 Through Aug. 26: "Tokyo Decadence" (Ryu Murakami).
 From Aug. 27: "Careful" (Guy Maddin).
VILLAGE EAST CINEMAS, 2nd Ave. at 12th. (529-6799)
 Theatre 1: "Un Coeur en Hiver" (†).
 Theatre 2: Through Aug. 19: "Boys' Shorts: The New Queer Cinema," a program of six short films. From Aug. 20: "The Ballad of Little Jo" (Maggie Greenwald).
 Theatre 3: "Being at Home with Claude" (Jean Boudin; in French).
 Theatre 4: "Twist" (†).
 Theatre 5: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
 Theatre 6: "The Meteor Man" (Robert Townsend).
 Theatre 7: "112th & Central: Through the Eyes of the Children," a documentary.
19TH STREET EAST 4, B'way at 19th. (260-8000)
 Theatre 1: "The Fugitive" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Sleepless in Seattle" (†).
 Theatre 3: "Poetic Justice" (†).
 Theatre 4: "The Firm" (†).
 Theatre 5: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
 Theatre 6: "The Fugitive" (†).
BAY CINEMA, 2nd Ave. at 32nd. (679-0160)
 "In the Line of Fire" (†).
MURRAY HILL CINEMAS, 160 E. 34th. (689-6548)
 Theatre 1: "Sleepless in Seattle" (†).
 Theatre 2: "The Meteor Man" (Robert Townsend, with Townsend).
 Theatre 3: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
 Theatre 4: "Poetic Justice" (†).
34TH STREET SHOWPLACE, 238 E. 34th. (532-5544)
 Theatre 1: "Coneheads" (†).
 Theatre 2: "The Firm" (†).
 Theatre 3: "The Fugitive" (†).
34TH ST. EAST, 241 E. 34th. (683-0255)
 "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" (†).
EASTSIDE PLAYHOUSE, 3rd Ave. at 55th. (755-3020)
 "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau, in Spanish).
SUTTON I AND 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th. (759-1411)
 Theatre 1: "Free Willy" (Simon Wincer).
 Theatre 2: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
GOTHAM CINEMA, 3rd Ave. at 58th. (759-2262)
 Through Aug. 19: "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" (†).
 From Aug. 20: "El Cid" (1961, Anthony Mann, with Charlton Heston).
PLAZA, 42 E. 58th. (355-3320)
 "Coneheads" (†).
MANHATTAN TWIN, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (935-6420)
 Theatre 1: "Poetic Justice" (†).
 Theatre 2: "The Meteor Man" (Robert Townsend).

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN THE MOVIE HOUSES

S • M • T • W • T • F • S						
			18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A DAGGER ARE
DESCRIBED IN "MOVIES IN BRIEF,"
STARTING ON PAGE 38.

59TH STREET EAST CINEMA, 239 E. 59th. (759-4630)
 Through Aug. 24: (Matinées only) "Tom and Jerry—The Movie" (Phil Roman); and (evenings only) "So I Married an Axe Murderer" (Thomas Schlamme).
 From Aug. 25: "Only the Strong" (Sheldon Lettich).
BARONET AND CORONET, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (355-1663)
 Theatre 1: "Sleepless in Seattle" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Rising Sun" (†).
CINEMA I, CINEMA II, and CINEMA 3RD AVENUE, 3rd Ave. at 60th. (753-6022)
 Theatre 1: "That Night" (Craig Bolotin).
 Theatre 2: "House of Angels" (†).
 Theatre 3: Through Aug. 19: "What's Love Got to Do with It" (Brian Gibson). From Aug. 20: "Betty" (Claude Chabrol; in French).
ART EAST CINEMA, 1st Ave. at 61st. (644-1111)
 To be announced.
FIRST & 62ND CINEMAS, 400 E. 62nd. (752-4600)
 Theatre 1: "Jurassic Park" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Much Ado About Nothing" (Kenneth Branagh).
 Theatre 3: "The Wedding Banquet" (Ang Lee).
 Theatre 4: "The Secret Garden" (Agnieszka Holland, with Maggie Smith).
 Theatre 5: "Heart and Souls" (Ron Underwood).
 Theatre 6: "Heart and Souls." (†).
GEMINI I AND 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th. (832-1670)
 Theatre 1: "The Fugitive" (†).
 Theatre 2: "The Fugitive" (†).
BECKMAN, 2nd Ave. at 66th. (737-2622)
 "Manhattan Murder Mystery" (†).



Steven Zaillian's "Searching for Bobby Fischer."

NEW YORK TWIN, 2nd Ave. at 67th. (744-7339)
 Theatre 1: "In the Line of Fire" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Searching for Bobby Fischer" (Steven Zaillian).
68TH ST. PLAYHOUSE, 3rd Ave. at 68th. (734-0302)
 Through Aug. 19: "Amongst Friends" (†).
 From Aug. 20: "The Ballad of Little Jo" (Maggie Greenwald), with Suzy Amis.
TOWER EAST, 3rd Ave. at 71st. (879-1313)
 "The Firm" (†).
EAST 85TH STREET, 1st Ave. at 85th. (249-5100)
 "The Firm" (†).
PARK & 86TH STREET CINEMAS, 125 E. 86th. (534-1880)
 Theatre 1: "Jurassic Park" (†).
 Theatre 2: "In the Line of Fire" (†).
ORPHEUM VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (876-2400)
 Theatre 1: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
 Theatre 2: "Sleepless in Seattle" (†).
 Theatre 3: "Rising Sun" (†).
 Theatre 4: (Matinées only) "Free Willy" (Simon Wincer); and (evenings only) "Poetic Justice" (†).
 Theatre 5: "The Fugitive" (†).
 Theatre 6: "The Secret Garden" (Agnieszka Holland, with Maggie Smith).
 Theatre 7: "The Fugitive" (†).
86TH STREET EAST TWIN, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (249-1144)
 Theatre 1: "The Meteor Man" (Robert Townsend, with Townsend).
 Theatre 2: "Hocus Pocus" (Kenny Ortega).

WEST SIDE

FILM FORUM, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
 Theatre 1: "Stepping Razor-Red X" (directed by Nicholas Campbell), a documentary.
 Theatre 2: See listings under Revival Houses.
 Theatre 3: "Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives" (Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie).
WAVERLY I AND 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd. (929-8037)
 Theatre 1: "Heart and Souls" (Ron Underwood, with Robert Downey, Jr.).
 Theatre 2: To be announced.
ART GREENWICH TWIN, Greenwich Ave. at 12th. (929-3350)
 Theatre 1: "Jurassic Park" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Rising Sun" (†).
QUAD CINEMA, 34 W. 13th. (255-8800)
 Theatre 1: "The Killer" (1989, John Woo).
 Theatre 2: "Road Scholar" (Roger Weisberg).
 Theatre 3: "For a Lost Soldier" (Roeland Kerbosch, in Dutch).
 Theatre 4: "Strictly Ballroom" (Baz Luhrmann).
CHELSEA CINEMAS, 260 W. 23rd. (691-4744)
 Theatre 1: "The Meteor Man" (Robert Townsend, with Townsend).
 Theatre 2: "Jurassic Park" (†).
 Theatre 3: "The Secret Garden" (Agnieszka Holland, with Maggie Smith).
 Theatre 4: "Rising Sun" (†).
 Theatre 5: "In the Line of Fire" (†).
 Theatre 6: "Heart and Souls" (Ron Underwood).
 Theatre 7: "Rising Sun" (†).
 Theatre 8: "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" (†).
 Theatre 9: "In the Line of Fire" (†).
23RD ST. WEST TRIPLEX, 333 W. 23rd. (989-0060)
 Theatre 1: "Free Willy" (Simon Wincer).
 Theatre 2: Through Aug. 24: "So I Married an Axe Murderer" (Thomas Schlamme). From Aug. 25: "Only the Strong" (Sheldon Lettich), with Mark Dacascos.
 Theatre 3: "What's Love Got to Do with It" (Brian Gibson), with Angela Bassett and Laurence Fishburne.
GUILD, 33 W. 50th. (757-2406)
 "In the Line of Fire" (†).
WORLDWIDE CINEMAS, 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)
 Theatre 1: "Menace II Society" (Allen and Albert Hughes).
 Theatre 2: "Rookie of the Year" (Daniel Stern).
 Theatre 3: (Matinées only) "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937); and (evenings only) "Dave" (Ivan Reitman), with Kevin Kline.
 Theatre 4: "Free Willy" (Simon Wincer).
 Theatre 5: "Sleepless in Seattle" (†).
 Theatre 6: (Matinées only) "Tom and Jerry—The Movie" (Phil Roman); and (evenings only) "Cliffhanger" (Renny Harlin).



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upside down
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coming out
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MOVIE HOUSES—Cont'd

ZIEGFELD, 141 W. 54th. (765-7600)
 "Jurassic Park" (†).
FESTIVAL, 6 W. 57th. (307-7856)
 "Especially on Sunday" (Marco Tullio Giordana, Giuseppe Bertolucci, and Giuseppe Tornatore; in Italian).
57TH ST. PLAYHOUSE, 110 W. 57th. (581-7360)
 Through Aug. 19: "What's Love Got to Do with It" (Brian Gibson), with Angela Bassett and Laurence Fishburne.
 From Aug. 20: "The Ballad of Little Jo" (Maggie Greenwald), with Suzy Amis.
CARNEGIE HALL CINEMAS, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (265-2520)
 Theatre 1: "Road Scholar" (Roger Weisberg).
 Theatre 2: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau, in Spanish).
ANGELIKA 57, 225 W. 57th. (586-1900)
 "From Hollywood to Hanoi" (Tiana Thi Thanh Nga; in English, French, and Vietnamese), a documentary.
PARIS, 4 W. 58th. (980-5656)
 Through Aug. 19: "The Music of Chance" (Philip Haas), with James Spader and Mandy Patinkin.
 From Aug. 20: "King of the Hill" (Steven Soderberg).
CINEMA 3, 2 W. 59th. (752-5959)
 "Strictly Ballroom" (Baz Luhrmann).
COLUMBUS CIRCLE, B'way at 61st. (247-5070)
 "The Secret Garden" (Agnieszka Holland), with Maggie Smith.
62ND & BROADWAY, 62 W. 62nd. (265-7466)
 To be announced.
LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS, B'way at 63rd. (757-2280)
 Theatre 1: "Much Ado About Nothing" (Kenneth Branagh).
 Theatre 2: "Orlando" (Sally Potter).
 Theatre 3: "The Wedding Banquet" (Ang Lee).
 Theatre 4: "Tito and Me" (Goran Markovic; in Serbo-Croatian).
 Theatre 5: "Guelwaar" (Ousmane Sembène; in French and Wolof).
 Theatre 6: "Un Coeur en Hiver" (†).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

CRITERION CENTER, B'way at 44th. (354-0900)
 Theatre 1: "The Meteor Man" (directed by Robert Townsend), with Townsend.
 Theatre 2: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
 Theatre 3: "The Meteor Man."
 Theatre 4: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday."
 Theatre 5: "The Fugitive" (†).
 Theatre 6: "Rising Sun" (†).
 Theatre 7: "Rising Sun" (†).
EMBASSY I, B'way at 46th. (302-0494)
 Through Aug. 26: "My Boyfriend's Back" (Bob Balaban), with Andrew Lowery.
 From Aug. 27: "Father Hood" (Darrell Roodt).
EMBASSY 2, 3, AND 4, 7th Ave. at 47th. (730-7262)
 Theatre 1: "In the Line of Fire" (†).
 Theatre 2: "Coneheads" (†).
 Theatre 3: "What's Love Got to Do with It" (Brian Gibson).
ASTOR PLAZA, 44th St. at B'way. (869-8340)
 "The Firm" (†).
NATIONAL TWIN, B'way at 44th. (869-0950)
 Theatre 1: Through Aug. 24: "Poetic Justice" (†). From Aug. 25: "Only the Strong" (Sheldon Lettich), with Mark Dacascos.
 Theatre 2: "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" (†).

REVIVAL HOUSES

FILM FORUM 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
 A program of films directed by Otto Preminger.
GRAMERCY, Lexington at 23rd. (475-1660)
 A program of films with Elizabeth Taylor.
THALIA, B'way at 95th. (316-4962)
 Through Aug. 19: "The Searchers" (1956, John Ford); and "Wagonmaster" (1950, Ford).
 Aug. 20-23: "The Parallax View" (1974, Alan J. Pakula); and "The Conversation" (1974, Francis Ford Coppola).
 Aug. 24-26: "Breaker Morant" (1980, Bruce Beresford); and "Gallipoli" (1981, Peter Weir).
 Aug. 27-30: "Chinatown" (1974, Roman Polanski); and "Murder, My Sweet" (1945, Edward Dmytryk).
 From Aug. 31: "Captain Blood" (1935, Michael Curtiz); and "The Sea Hawk" (1940, Curtiz).

Aug. 25: "Stage Fright" (1950, Alfred Hitchcock); and "Strangers on a Train" (1951, Hitchcock).
 Aug. 26: "Fanny and Alexander" (1983, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish).
 Aug. 27-28: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese); and "The King of Comedy" (1983, Scorsese).
 Aug. 29: "Children of Paradise" (1945, Marcel Carné; in French).
 Aug. 30: "Au Hasard, Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French); and "Mouchette" (1966, Bresson; in French).
 Aug. 31: "This Gun for Hire" (1942, Frank Tuttle); and "The Glass Key" (1942, Stuart Heisler).

FILM LIBRARIES, ETC.

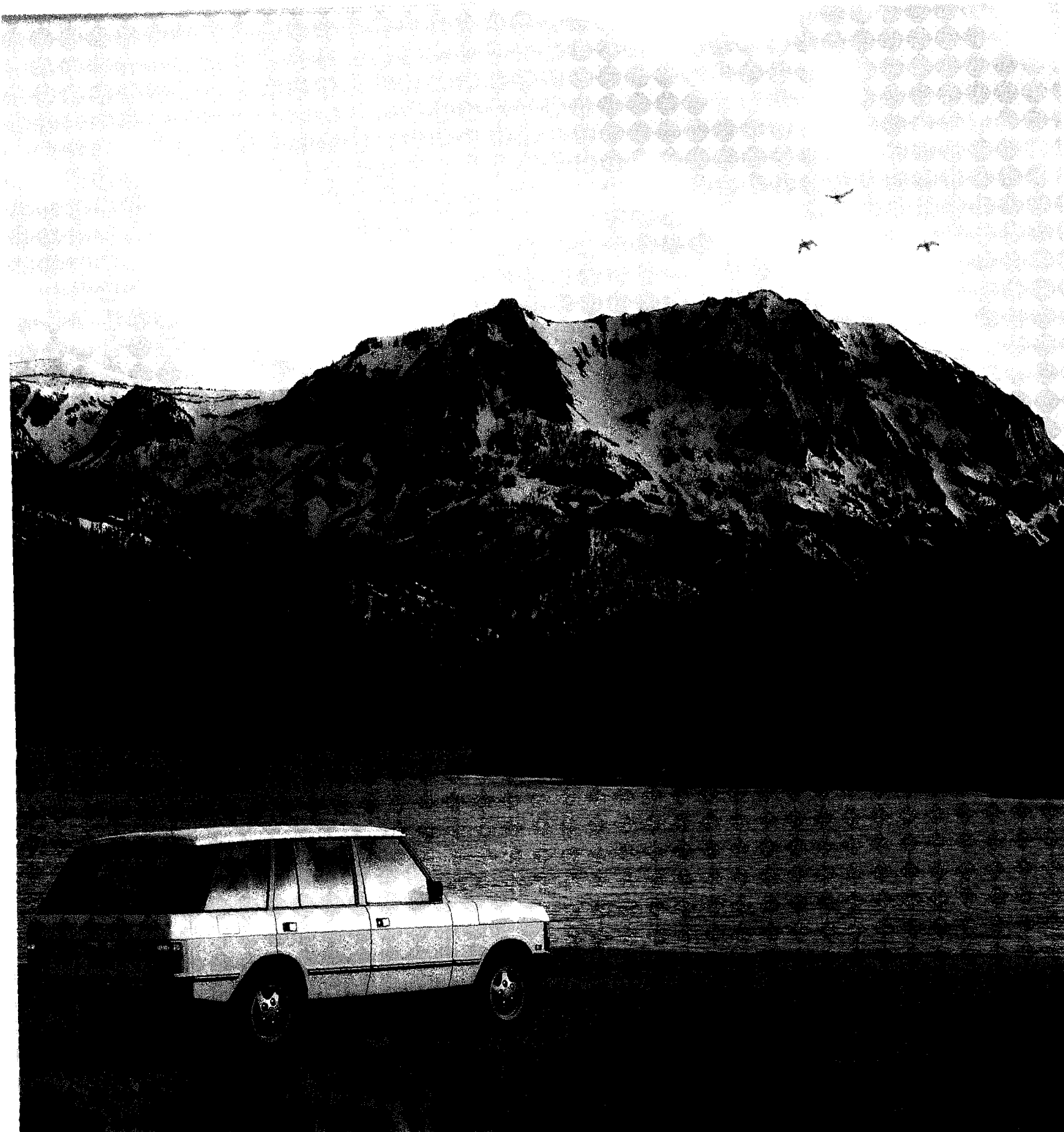
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of silent films from the museum's archives.
WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. (875-5600)—Aug. 18 at 2, 5:45, and 9:30: "The Jackie Robinson Story" (1950, Alfred Green). . . . Aug. 18 at 3:30 and 7:15: "The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings" (†). . . . Aug. 19 at 2 and 6: "Fear Strikes Out" (1957, Robert Mulligan). . . . Aug. 19 at 4 and 8: "Bang the Drum Slowly" (1973, John Hancock), with Michael Moriarty and Robert De Niro. . . . Aug. 20 at 2, 4:15, 6:30, and 9, Aug. 21-22 at 4:15, 6:30, and 9, Aug. 23 at 10, Aug. 24 at 10:15, and Aug. 25-26 at 9:30: "Dark at Noon" (1992, Raúl Ruiz; in French), with John Hurt. . . . Aug. 21-22 at 2: "White Fang" (1990, Randal Kleiser). . . . Aug. 28-29 at 2: "Cry of the Penguins" (1971, Al Viola), with Hurt and Hayley Mills. . . . From Aug. 23: A program of films with James Mason.
AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria. (1-718 784-0077)—Aug. 21 and 28 at 4 and Aug. 22 and 29 at 2 and 4: Six different programs of films by George Kuchar. . . . Aug. 21 at 2: "The Valley of Gwangi" (1969, James O'Connolly). . . . Aug. 28 at 2: "When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth" (1971, Val Guest).
FLORENCE GOULD HALL, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Aug. 18 at 12:30 and 6: "Casque d'Or" (1952, Jacques Becker; in French). . . . Aug. 18 at 3:15 and 8:45: "Thérèse Raquin" (1953, Marcel Carné; in French). . . . Aug. 25 at 12:30 and 6: "My Night at Maud's" (1970, Eric Rohmer; in French). . . . Aug. 25 at 3:15 and 8:45: "Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle" (†).
BRYANT PARK, Sixth Ave. at 41st St. (982-4142)—Mondays, starting at dusk, free, drive-in-style moviegoing, beginning with Looney Tunes cartoons, coming attractions, and an onscreen clock that counts down the minutes until the feature begins. Aug. 23: "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955, Nicholas Ray), James Dean, Natalie Wood, and Sal Mineo. . . . Aug. 30: "Adam's Rib" (1949, George Cukor).
SYMPHONY SPACE, B'way at 95th St. (864-5400)—Aug. 19 at 7: "The 4th Man" (1982, Paul Verhoeven; in Dutch). . . . Aug. 19 at 9: "Basic Instinct" (1992, Verhoeven). . . . Aug. 20 at 6:30: "Mephisto" (1982, István Szabó; in German). . . . Aug. 20 at 9: "Colonel Redl" (†). . . . Aug. 21 at 7:30: "Pauline at the Beach" (1982, Eric Rohmer; in French). . . . Aug. 21 at 9:15: "A Tale of Springtime" (1992, Rohmer; in French). . . . Aug. 22 at 6: "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988, Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish). . . . Aug. 22 at 7:45: "Mata-dor" (1986, Almodóvar; in Spanish).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Aug. 20-22 and 27-29 at 7 and 9: A program of films by Hal Hartley.



Self-portrait by George Kuchar (see American Museum of the Moving Image).

REGENCY, B'way at 67th. (724-3700)
 "Rising Sun" (†).
84TH STREET SIXPLEX, B'way at 84th. (877-3600)
 Theatre 1: "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday" (Adam Marcus).
 Theatre 2: "The Fugitive" (†).
 Theatre 3: "Sleepless in Seattle" (†).
 Theatre 4: "Searching for Bobby Fischer" (Steven Zaillian).
 Theatre 5: "The Firm" (†).
 Theatre 6: (Matinees only) "Free Willy" (Simon Wincer); and (evenings only) "The Fugitive" (†).
METRO CINEMA I AND 2, B'way at 99th. (222-1200)
 Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" (†).
 Theatre 2: To be announced.
OLYMPIA I AND II, B'way at 107th. (865-8128)
 Theatre 1: Through Aug. 24: "Jurassic Park" (†).
 From Aug. 25: "Only the Strong" (Sheldon Lettich).
 Theatre 2: "The Meteor Man" (Robert Townsend).

THEATRE 80 ST. MARKS, 80 St. Marks Pl. (254-7400)
 Aug. 18: "If . . ." (1969, Lindsay Anderson); and "This Sporting Life" (1963, Anderson).
 Aug. 19: "The Dead Zone" (1983, David Cronenberg); and "Dead Ringers" (1988, Cronenberg).
 Aug. 20-21: "Midnight Cowboy" (1969, John Schlesinger); and "The Graduate" (1967, Mike Nichols).
 Aug. 22: "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1919, Robert Wiene; a German silent film); and "M" (1932, Fritz Lang; in German).
 Aug. 23: "The Nada Gang" (1974, Claude Chabrol; in French); and "Wedding in Blood" (1974, Chabrol; in French).
 Aug. 24: "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (1958, Richard Brooks); and "The Night of the Iguana" (1964, John Huston), with Richard Burton, Ava Gardner, and Sue Lyon.



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MOVIES IN BRIEF

SEE PRECEDING PAGES FOR THEATRE ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS. IF A MOVIE HAS BEEN REVIEWED IN "THE CURRENT CINEMA" DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE DATE OF ITS REVIEW IS GIVEN.

A League of His Own

JAMES MASON knew how to make brusqueness seductive—his soothing baritone and aggrieved glance could tenderize the most cold-blooded, cerebral roles. So it's not totally surprising that this master of adult emotions was cast as an eccentric scientist in two of the fifties' most enjoyable family-targeted science-fiction hits: "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," which launched Hollywood's Jules Verne craze in 1954; and "Journey to the Center of the Earth," which tapped into the ongoing Verne mania in 1959. (Both are playing August 29-30 at the Walter Reade Theatre, as part of the series "Velvet and Steel: James Mason in Retrospect.")

"League" is set in 1866, when the vengeful genius Captain Nemo patrols the seas in his elegant submarine, the Nautilus, and tries (he says) to bring about world peace through terrorism. Mason captures all of Nemo's extremist colors. When he enters a psychotic zone as he prepares to ram a ship, he's Verne's answer to Captain Ahab; when he shows off the natural magic of the ocean floor and the technological magic of his ship, he's an oceanic Prospero (all the sea's his stage); and when he plays Bach's "Toccat in D Minor" on the pipe organ, he's the Phantom of the Opera, too.

In "Earth," set in 1880, Mason plays a celebrated Edinburgh scholar who leads an unlikely expedition (including Pat Boone and Arlene Dahl) twenty thousand leagues under the ground. Obsessed with research, oblivious of social niceties, he's an academic cliché: the absent-minded professor. But Mason gives the caricature a satiric rubdown and a filip of sentiment. Even when competing with giant lizards and extravagant sets, he provides this geological phantasmagoria with a magnetic core.

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow.)

AMONGST FRIENDS—If this suburban crime movie is the latest word on Generation X, why does it resemble something Martin Scorsese did two decades ago? The setting may be the Five Towns of Long Island and the antiheroes may be Jewish, but the story of friendship and betrayal in a group of spoiled-rotten petty crooks is pure "Mean Streets"; it would make a lot more sense if we saw the three lead boy-men pop Scorsese's film into their VCRs. The writer-director, Rob Weiss, does have shrewd timing—the plot moves like clockwork, and just about as mechanically, too. His observations are commonplace, and he flounders whenever he veers from white rap or tough-guyese—as in the scenes between the most idealistic, nonconformist member of the bunch (Patrick McGaw) and his high-school sweetheart (Mira Sorvino). Joseph Lindsey is the slipperiest gangsterling, a would-be Mr. Big, and Steve Parlavacchio is the garden-variety worm who turns.—M.S. (Angelika Film Center. . . . 68th St. Playhouse; through Aug. 19.)

THE BINGO LONG TRAVELING ALL-STARS AND MOTOR KINGS (1976)—Rowdy, good-natured comedy-melodrama about a barnstorming black baseball team. Set in 1939, in the period just before major-league clubs admitted black players, it shows the players' attitudes toward the cakewalking and clowning expected of them by white crowds. It's like a modern, black variant of the thirties lunatic football comedies, such as "Pigskin Parade." The cast is headed by Richard Pryor, Billy Dee Williams, Stan Shaw, and James Earl Jones, whose great deep voice functions as a joke all by itself. The script, by Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins, has some sophisticated, double-edged ideas but is short on characterization; it settles for a few too many cheap laughs, such as those involving a loud, fat black woman, and has too

COLONEL REDL (1985)—István Szabó retells the story of Alfred Redl (the subject of John Osborne's "A Patriot for Me"), a railroad worker's son who rose to the highest military ranks of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—and committed suicide. Along with his co-writer, Peter Dobai, and his star, Klaus Maria Brandauer, Szabó portrays Redl as a true believer in the Hapsburg monarchy. Whether he's disciplining troops or ratting on fellow-officers, this ruthless power-seeker and spy-catcher is convinced that he acts for the common good. The movie is about a closet homosexual who tries to pour himself into the most socially desirable mold. But neither the persona nor the man carries the movie. Szabó is too cautious; he doesn't shape the sequences enough to hold an audience. Al-



James Mason in "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea."

many cartooned black capitalistic club owners and sadistic white villains (who, for unexplained reasons, have sinister Scandinavian accents). Directed by John Badham (it was his first picture, followed by "Saturday Night Fever"); cinematography by Bill Butler.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 18.)

UN COEUR EN HIVER—Claude Sautet's film, as its title suggests, is not much of a heartwarmer, but its cool look at thwarted passion is enthralling nonetheless. Stéphane (Daniel Auteuil) makes and mends violins; Camille (Emmanuelle Béart) plays them. The two of them shift from distrust to desire to disappointment—in other words, they go through all the motions of love except the making of it. This is so restrained it's shocking; we feel the terrible pressure of all that Stéphane might do with his life and yet refuses to attempt. With his spirit as buttoned down as his shirts, Auteuil offers a startling portrayal of failure, never hamming it up for the sake of our compassion. André Dussollier turns in an equally quiet performance as Stéphane's business partner and rival in love; add Béart's immaculate poise, and you wonder what strange district of Paris this is. In French.—A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/7/93.) (Village East Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

though he doesn't adhere strictly to the facts, his film plays out like a series of historical illustrations. The emotional distance muzzles Brandauer, who fails to bring out all the character's wiliness and pathos—until the bang-up ending. With Armin Mueller-Stahl, Gudrun Landgrave, and Jan Niklas. In German.—M.S. (Symphony Space; Aug. 20.)

CONEHEADS—High brows and low comedy blend in this clever extension of the Conehead sketches from "Saturday Night Live." The director, Steve Barron, brings deadpan goofiness and crisp visual charm to the tale of a cone-domed husband and wife from the planet Remulak, who crash-land in the East River, have a daughter, settle down in New Jersey, and pretend to be from France. (The parents are, as always, Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin; the fizzy Michelle Burke is their rebellious teenager.) The movie is a series of riffs on immigration and naturalization. Hiding out from I.N.S. honcho Michael McKean and his suck-up underling (the hilariously fey David Spade), the supercompetent Coneheads assume the coloration of the suburban American middle class—and turn illegal-alien stereotypes on their pointy heads. Conehead argot veers between hyperrational definitions ("pizza" is "starch disk") and nonsense talk ("where" is

ROBERT RISKO

"flarthag"). It has a silly catchiness, as do the pop-culture references and sight gags. The cameo appearances by late-night TV comics are variable in quality, but Dave Thomas boasts a gasbag grandeur as Remulak's Highmaster. All in all, it's a pick-me-up.—M.S. (34th Street Showplace, Plaza, and Embassy.)

THE FIRM—That Cub Scout of superstars Tom Cruise is perfectly cast as the go-getting, whitebread hero of John Grisham's tale of chicanery and murder in a hoity-toity Memphis law firm. The director, Sydney Pollack, and his usual phalanx of screenwriters (Robert Towne, David Rayfiel, and David Rabe get script credit) try to improve on their source—and only partially succeed. The clunky plot continues to be riddled with implausibilities, and the movie runs a slack two hours and thirty-four minutes. But Pollack and his team do come up with a more logical line of action and give the hero and his wife (the sexy, skeptical Jeanne Tripplehorn) a smidgen of self-awareness. And they soup up the side characters. Holly Hunter, Gary Bussey, Ed Harris, David Strathairn, and Wilford Brimley do themselves proud, and Gene Hackman is in a class by himself, brewing unprecedented mixtures of moral dry rot, fellow feeling, and animal vitality.—M.S. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Tower East, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, and Astor Plaza.)

FOUR ADVENTURES OF REINETTE AND MIRABELLE (1989)—This Eric Rohmer's picture doesn't belong to his "Comedies and Proverbs" cycle, and it isn't the beginning of a new series, either. It's not much of anything, actually—just a quartet of sketches about a country girl (Joëlle Miquel) and a city girl (Jessica Forde). Most of it was shot, in 16 m.m., while Rohmer and his crew were waiting to film the "green ray" effect for his 1987 "Summer"; this movie was conceived as a diversion, an agreeable time killer, and it's very, very slight. The first episode, "The Blue Hour," which takes place in the country, is the most satisfying; an elegant little essay on natural sounds and the value of silence. The remaining three—set in Paris, where Reinette and Mirabelle share an apartment—are no more than anecdotes: casual, graceful, and utterly trivial. The movie is almost weightless, yet it has its own brand of airy integrity. Rohmer respects his characters and their sometimes peculiar ideas; every argument is permitted to run its course, and we're free to find it silly or profound. In French.—T.R. (Florence Gould Hall; Aug. 25.)

THE FUGITIVE—Yet another adaptation of an old TV series. This time, however, the movie can stand on its own. Harrison Ford plays Dr. Richard Kimble, who is wrongly accused of murdering his wife and sentenced to death. He manages to escape, courtesy of a great-looking train smash, and goes on the run, hiding under leaves, jumping off a dam, lying low in Chicago—while searching for the true killer. This is nicely judged: you feel the weight of Kimble's raw, solemn panic, but it's good fun rooting for him as he hunts for a way out of each fix. What gives the movie its extra kick, however, is the presence of Tommy Lee Jones, as U.S. Deputy Marshal Sam Gerard, hot on Kimble's trail, and enjoying the heat. Each man knows that the other is a true adversary, and there is mental muscle, not just physical daring, at work on their private common ground. The director is Andrew Davis, who brought us the schlocky "Under Siege"; this is equally tense and insistent, but the two leading men rack it up to a higher level altogether—they even overcome the rude horrors of James Newton Howard's soundtrack. It's a pleasure to find a thriller fulfilling its duties with such gusto: the emotions ring solid, the script finds time to relax into backchat, and for once the stunts look like acts of desperation rather than shows of prowess. When everything is happily resolved, you can't suppress a twinge of disappointment; Kimble is so gifted a fugitive by now that you feel he should carry on running and never stop.—A.L. (8/16/93) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

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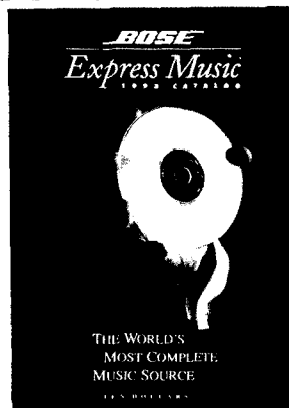
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IN BRIEF—Cont'd

HOUSE OF ANGELS—A Swedish production, directed by an Englishman. Colin Nutley's odd, uncertain movie stars Helena Bergström as Fanny, who inherits a house and estate deep in the Swedish countryside. The hook is simple enough: her new home and the surrounding community are placid and cobwebby, but she turns up to claim the property on a Harley-Davidson, wearing black leather and stockings. The old, in other words, must slug it out with the new—we could be watching Sweden's answer to Ealing comedy. Nutley gets it going briskly enough, unveiling a fine array of local gossips and weirdos: but none of them quite takes fire as a character, and the film itself loses heart. The plot seems to run in place instead of pushing forward, and it lacks a true climax—there's a promising party, involving a vicar and a chainsaw, but Nutley cuts away and forgets about it. Many will find this kindly and charming, but there's something fixed about the charm; being both cool and tenderhearted (and filmed in long shot with the sun in her hair), Fanny holds all the aces from the start, and where's the fun in that? In Swedish.—A.L. (Cinema II.)

IN THE LINE OF FIRE—Clint Eastwood plays Frank Horrigan, a tired-looking middle-aged Secret Service agent who gets wind of a plot to kill the President and marshals his flagging powers in an attempt to stop the assassin (John Malkovich). It's a basic race against the clock: the good guy knows what the bad guy means to do; the villain's preparations and the hero's investigation run on separate tracks until they converge, like runaway trains, at the scene of the intended crime. The heroics are stirring, because the star's ravaged face and stiff, weary gestures tell us that everything Horrigan does costs him something, physically and emotionally. The director, Wolfgang Petersen, isn't a particularly imaginative or stylish filmmaker, but he delivers the goods, and in record time. Both Eastwood's performance and the movie itself have the quality of meat-and-potatoes

genre-picture entertainment: nothing fancy, nothing unusual. The only hints of more exotic and unpredictable sensations come from Malkovich, who is threatening to become the most gloriously peculiar screen presence since the heyday of Alastair Sim. Also with Rene Russo.—T.R. (7/12/93) (Village Theatre VII, Bay Cinema, New York Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Guild, and Embassy.)

JURASSIC PARK—Steven Spielberg's warm-blooded, state-of-the-art dinosaurs are a lot speedier than their nearest movie kin, the galumphing atomic-mutant monsters that crunched Japanese cities under their feet in the fifties and early sixties, and that enables the filmmaker to create dynamic stalk-and-chase sequences. But neither the carnivorous dinos nor the placid herbivores inspire anything close to awe, even with the aid of audience stimulants like surging symphonic music (by the shameless John Williams) and repeated closeups of wide-eyed, openmouthed actors. The screenplay, which is credited to Michael Crichton and David Koepp, reduces Crichton's intricately constructed novel to its bare bones: people running away from hungry animals. For all the ingenuity of the movie's engineering, "Jurassic Park" doesn't have the imagination—or the courage—to take us any place we haven't been a thousand times before. It's just a creature feature on amphetamines.—T.R. (6/28/93) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, and Ziegfeld. . . ♣ Olympia; through Aug. 24.)

LASSIE COME HOME (1943)—Dog loves boy, dog loses boy, dog regains boy. The emotionally translucent young Roddy McDowall plays a Yorkshire lad whose financially strapped father (Donald Crisp) sells Lassie, the family collic, to a baron (Nigel Bruce). Elizabeth Taylor is the baron's granddaughter—a small but crucial part. When Taylor pledges to take care of Lassie for the boy, her vow is reassuring. No one with Taylor's youthful incandescence would let down a pal. The film isn't exciting, exactly (Fred M. Wilcox directed); it's square family entertainment.

But McDowall and Taylor, and the adult actors, too (including Elsa Lanchester as McDowall's mother and Edmund Gwenn as a peddler), make it lovable. Lassie is a lady among dogs—and Pal, the lad who plays her, is a great little actor. He uses his long snout expressively, especially when Lassie burrows plaintively under Crisp's arm. That's the way the whole movie nuzzles into your affections.—M.S. (Gramercy; Aug. 29-31.)

MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY—Directed by, and with, Woody Allen. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, and Beekman.)

POETIC JUSTICE—Four young blacks, including Justice (Janet Jackson) and Lucky (Tupac Shakur), drive from Los Angeles to Oakland over the weekend. This being the movies, it turns out to be a journey of revelation—more for the characters, in this case, than for the audience. We sit and stare while they bicker and smooch. The movie was written and directed by John Singleton, and it marks a depressing departure from his first feature, "Boyz n the Hood," which buzzed with rage and frustration. After a punchy start, the new film takes people away from their troubles, but it's a vacation without fun; we watch Justice gazing out to sea, or intoning lines of what is supposed to be her own verse. The poetry, written by Maya Angelou, clumps along with a confessional earnestness that makes you clench your fists and try not to laugh. The only live wire is Lucky, with his deep wariness of life; he has a couple of sprightly scenes that prod the picture awake. Otherwise, however, "Poetic Justice" feels oddly conservative in the kinds of feelings it shares out among its characters (especially the women), and in the cute domestic destinies it imagines for them. Like Jackson herself (who never gets to sing), the whole enterprise is so poker-faced, and takes itself so seriously, that you're left wondering how Singleton could have shed so much creative energy between one film and the next.—A.L. (8/2/93) (19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Manhattan Twin. . . ♣ Orpheum VII. Evenings only. . . ♣ National Twin; through Aug. 24.)



There's one Travelers Cheque for couple

RAINTREE COUNTY (1957)—A full-scale mess set during the Civil War. Based on the 1948 novel by Ross Lockridge, the script is so literary and chaotic it seems demented. At the start, the movie is all chatter and there's no hook to get us into the story; later the sequences don't flow together. As a rich, orphaned Southern belle, Elizabeth Taylor is soft-faced, with a ripe, full-lipped smile, and in the early part she's amusingly flirty and squealy. But as a handsome abolitionist Yankee, Montgomery Clift is in real trouble. It was in 1956, in the middle of making this picture, that he was disfigured in a car accident; he looks awful, he seems in agony, and his acting is mannered and odd. (Taylor, who's relatively unaffected, gives a better performance, even though all the fun goes out of her role.) The director, Edward Dmytryk, let by two major booby-prize performances: Walter Abel (actory-phony) and Agnes Moorehead (fake-jolly) as Clift's parents. But then this is the kind of movie in which a heavenly choir is heard while Taylor and Clift talk about the legendary magical rain tree. The cast includes Eva Marie Saint (who looks incredibly pretty), Rod Taylor, Lee Marvin, Nigel Patrick, Tom Drake, DeForest Kelley, and Gardner McKay. The screenplay is by Millard Kaufman; Johnny Green's music seems to be trying to create moods, but you get the feeling he's unsure what they should be.—P.K. (Gramercy; Aug. 25-26.)

RISEING SUN—Philip Kaufman's witty, luxuriantly sinister mystery thriller is set in contemporary Los Angeles: a sleek, corporate environment that isn't merely shady and deceitful, but fundamentally inauthentic, like virtual reality. The murder of a blond party girl in the boardroom of a powerful Japanese corporation exposes a dense network of connections—among business enterprises (Japanese and American), politicians, the police, and the press. The L.A.P.D. detectives investigating the case—Connor (Sean Connery), a Japan expert, and Smith (Wesley Snipes), his young partner—don't stand heroically apart from this alluring corporate culture; they're ambiguous heroes in a looking-glass world.

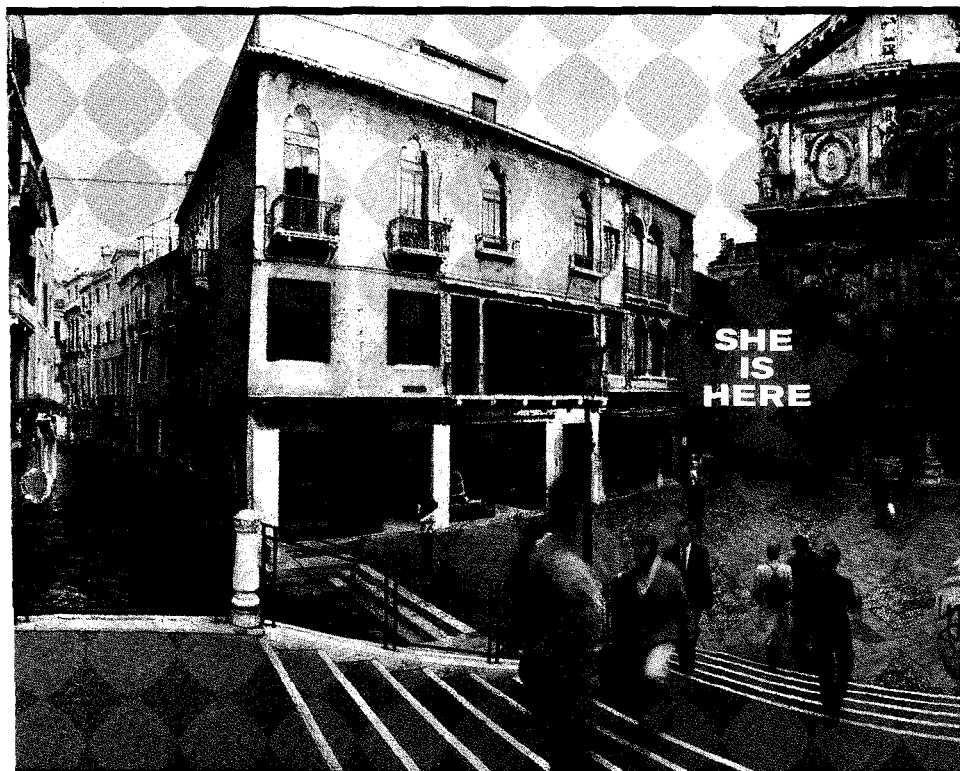
Connery and Snipes are both wonderful here. Kaufman treats cop-movie narrative conventions and film-noir visual style with a kind of affectionate irony; the picture provides plenty of creepy atmosphere and violent action, and its pace is relentless, but the over-all mood is playful, almost giddy. This detective story is a thrilling and eerily suggestive tour of a territory whose boundaries are maddeningly elusive, murderously fluid. The terrific supporting cast includes Harvey Keitel, Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, Tia Carrere, Ray Wise, Kevin Anderson, and Mako.—T.R. (7/26/93) (Coronet, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Regency, and Criterion Center.)

ROBIN HOOD: MEN IN TIGHTS—The funniest parts of Mel Brooks' lampoon of Sherwood Forest are Patrick Stewart's imitation of Sean Connery and Dom DeLuise's impression of a medieval Don Corleone named Don Giovanni. On the whole, Brooks goes off half-cocked. He teeters on the verge of slapstick operetta, but doesn't dare to take the plunge. Cary Elwes is comical and stalwart as Robin of Loxley; he dresses like Errol Flynn and assumes Flynn's bravado while sending up Kevin Costner. Amy Yasbeck is deliciously ardent as a hot-to-trot Maid Marian, and Roger Rees is admirable as the scramble-tongued Sheriff of Nottingham. (Alan Rickman, though, was more inspired as the sheriff in Costner's movie, subverting clatrap from within.) Richard Lewis's Prince John—a backdated version of his neurotic urban Jew—is simply frantic. Even when Brooks isn't recycling gags from previous hits, the humor is rarely as fresh as the *Mad* parody of the legend in the fifties, which had Robin blowing a "woodland horn" that was a saxophone, and stealing from the rich to give to himself.—M.S. (34th St. East, Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Cinema, and National Twin. . . .) (Gotham Cinema; through Aug. 19. . . .) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex; through Aug. 24.)

SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE—A romantic comedy, of sorts. The romance is airy and distant, because the lovers never meet until the final scene, and the comedy is kind of wistful, because it was directed by Nora Ephron. Tom Hanks plays

Sam, left miserable by the death of his wife, with only his young son, Jonah (Ross Malinger), to console him. The consolation goes a bit far; Jonah rings up a radio talk show to say that his dad needs love. Many listeners melt with sympathy, none more so than Annie (Meg Ryan), in Baltimore, shortly to be married and none too happy about it. For the rest of the movie, fate—and Jonah—do their best to bring the couple together, despite the continent that divides them. Hanks and Ryan have quick wits, and funny faces to match—they should be striking sparks off each other, not mooching around thousands of miles apart and waiting for something to happen. Hanks has a few goofy outbursts, and there is lively backup from Rosie O'Donnell and Rob Reiner as helpful friends, but anyone expecting another "When Harry Met Sally. . ." will be disappointed. At least Harry met Sally.—A.L. (7/19/93) (19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Baronet, Orpheum VII, Worldwide Cinemas, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

TWIST—Cheery, mindless fun—like the dance itself. Ron Mann ("Comic Book Confidential") applies his scrapbook method of documentary filmmaking to the craze that revolutionized dancing in America and around the world. According to Mann's conventional but enjoyable potpourri, the Ike-dominated fifties is Gale Storm celebrating the polka, and the media sanitizing R. & B. for the mainstream; the J.F.K.-dominated sixties is Chubby Checker swinging his hips, and the media popularizing the release of inhibitions, even on "American Bandstand." A slew of former "Bandstand" dancers and rock entertainers (including Honi Coles' partner Cholly Atkins, who was Motown's staff choreographer, and Gladys Horton of the Marvelettes) give punchy interviews and performances. The Harlem-based Parkettes, who billed themselves as "the world's greatest twisters," demonstrate that they still can't be beat. And Mann is true to rock history. He emphasizes that the gritty, suggestive Hank Ballard, not the smooth, genial Checker, introduced the song that started it all: "The Twist."—M.S. (Village East Cinemas.)



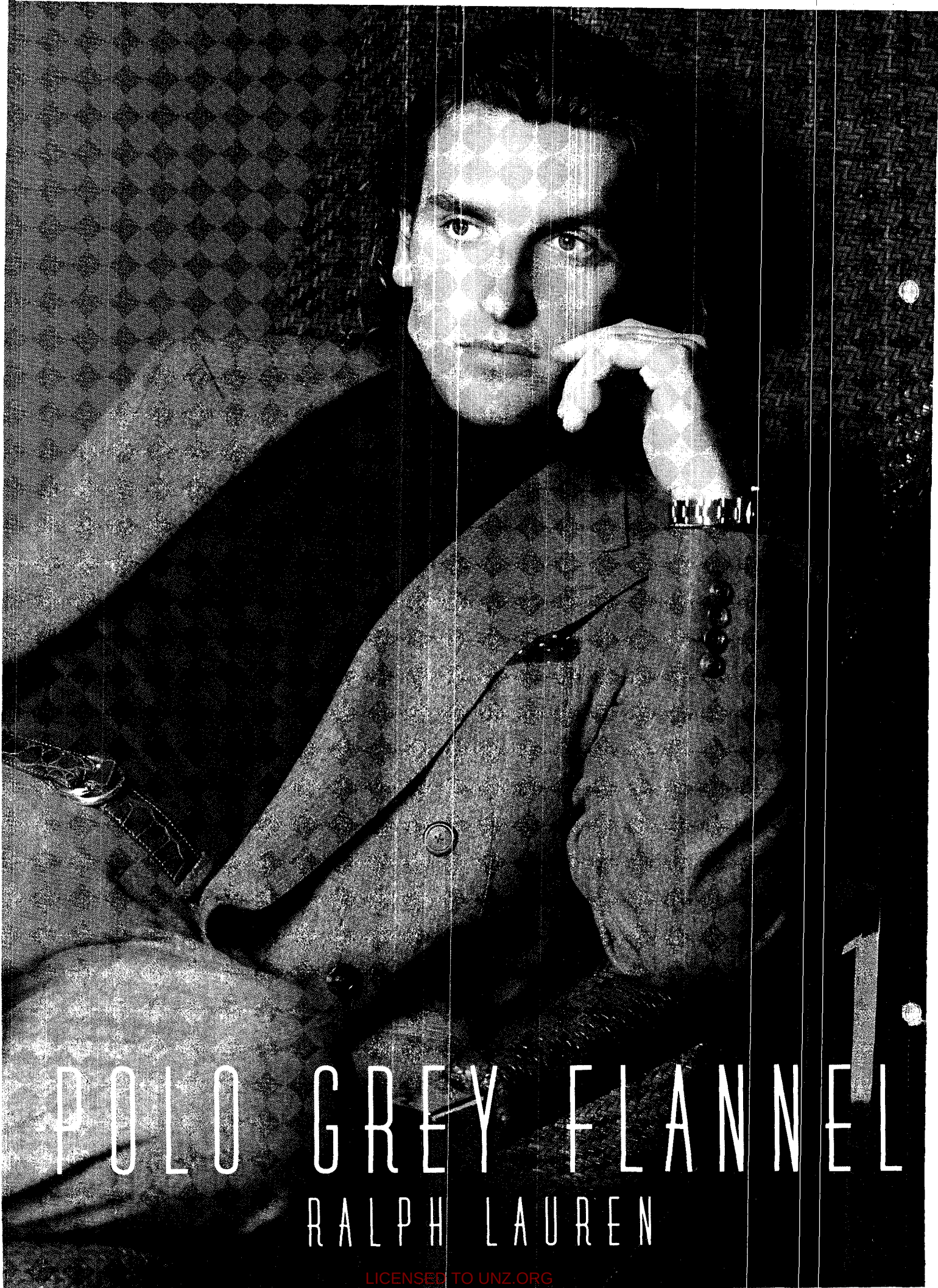
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POLO GREY FLANNEL

RALPH LAUREN



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

MERE STICK

"I'd never heard the broken-wand ceremony performed for anyone I knew personally," Irv Gonzalez, a salesman and demonstrator at Tannen's Magic Studio, on West Thirty-second Street, said. "It was awe-inspiring." Mr. Gonzalez was one of more than a hundred people who gathered at the Plaza Memorial Chapel, on Amsterdam Avenue in the nineties, the other evening to pay tribute to Frank Garcia, the Man with the Million-Dollar Hands. Mr. Garcia, who died last month at the age of sixty-six, was one of the world's greatest closeup magicians. His dazzling manipulation of cards, coins, cigarettes, and sponge balls led to a string of television appearances with the likes of Jack Paar, Merv Griffin, and Morey Amsterdam. His expertise in the ways of crooked gamblers earned him stints as a consultant to the F.B.I., the N.Y.P.D., and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and also undercover gigs on cruise ships to flush out card sharps. When he died, his was the lead obituary in the *Times*. Yet the intimate—even subtle—nature of his bailiwick meant that he could never achieve the wide fame enjoyed by the sort of magician who relies less on actual skill than on theatrics and giant, eye-popping illusions. Mr. Garcia won most recognition from his peers within the magic fraternity. They had declared him a legend while he was alive, and now that he was gone they had come to commemorate him in their own way.

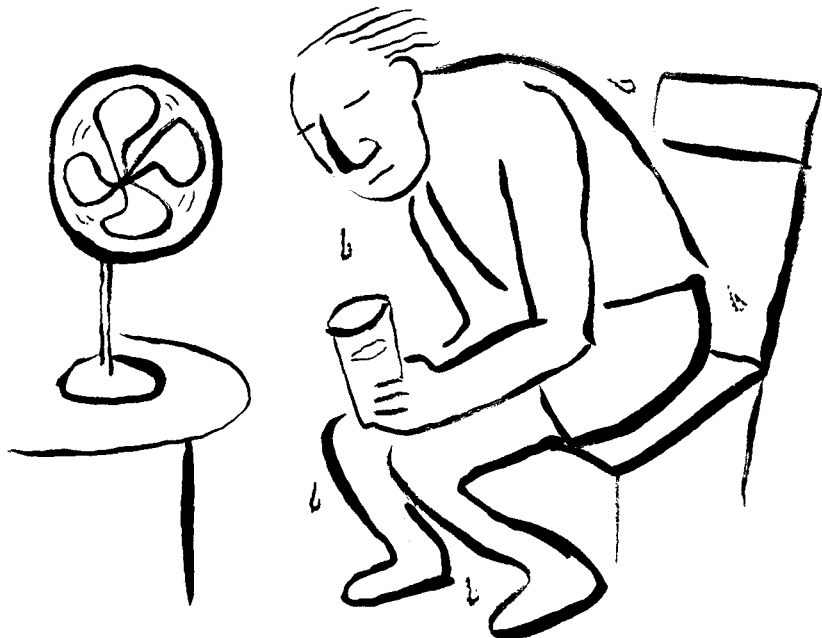
Among them were George Schindler, a past president of the Society of American Magicians; Tony Spina, the owner of Tannen's; Herb Zarrow, the inventor of the Zarrow shuffle; Dr. Ken Krenzel,

a psychologist and entertainer; and Jack Glickman, a former rabbi who sells magic tricks at the Fun Emporium, near Times Square. Also present were many lesser-known practitioners of the art—amateurs who earn their living as doctors or garment-industry salesmen or stockbrokers but spend most of their free time at magic conventions or at the magic table in the Edison Hotel coffee shop or at parties where they can try out new routines on their friends.

The memorial chapel, thanks to bright lighting and beige wall-to-wall carpeting, had the vaguely anonymous feel of a conference room in an airport Hilton. Lending it singularity on this evening, however, was an altar to Mr. Garcia, on the dais. It was covered with flowers sent from all over the country, among them an arrangement of red and white carnations that had been fashioned into an ace of hearts and was

signed "Our Friend and Namesake, From the Frank Garcia Ring #244 of the International Brotherhood of Magicians." The bouquets flanked a collection of framed photographs of Mr. Garcia at different stages of his career, the centerpiece being a large picture of him posing with Muhammad Ali. One could trace Mr. Garcia's transformation from lean, suave Latin heartthrob in white tie and tails, in his early publicity photographs, into the heavysset, avuncular bon vivant in houndstooth sports jacket of more recent snapshots.

After the service, George Schindler announced that he would perform the broken-wand ceremony. Mr. Schindler, a slight man with thinning hair, wire-rimmed glasses, and a gray-flecked beard, had known Mr. Garcia for more than fifty years—they met as amateur magicians—and the two had published seven books together. He explained that



JOSH GOSFIELD

this ceremony had been performed at Harry Houdini's funeral, in 1926, and was still repeated at his grave every year on the anniversary of his death. Then he asked all the magicians in the room to stand up. Three-quarters of the people there rose, and those who remained in their seats let out an audible gasp.

"It is with deep humility and genuine pride that I assume a role in this service, for I occupy no ministerial or clerical position," Mr. Schindler said. "I come as a representative of the Society of American Magicians and the magic fraternity, and as the humble spokesman of its members." He then produced a magic wand and held it up. "The magic wand is an ancient emblem of mystery," he went on. "It symbolizes the power that was yours, Frank, as you used your knowledge of magic secrets and your skill in their exemplification. Now its power is gone. It is a mere stick, devoid of all meaning and authority, useless without your hand to wield it."

Grasping the wand at both ends, Mr. Schindler snapped it in half with a sharp *thwick*. After a pause, he continued, "May the broken wand symbolize our submission to the mandate of the Supreme Magician, to whom all secrets are known, even of life and of death. Into the surety of his love we commit the keeping of our brother."

After the service ended, most of the

magicians lingered for a few minutes. One of them added several more photographs of Mr. Garcia to the collection at the front of the room. In one he was frozen for posterity under a fluttering cascade of playing cards, captured in mid-flight at the exact moment that some of them appeared to have fallen miraculously together to form the letters of his last name in the air.

VOCATION TIME

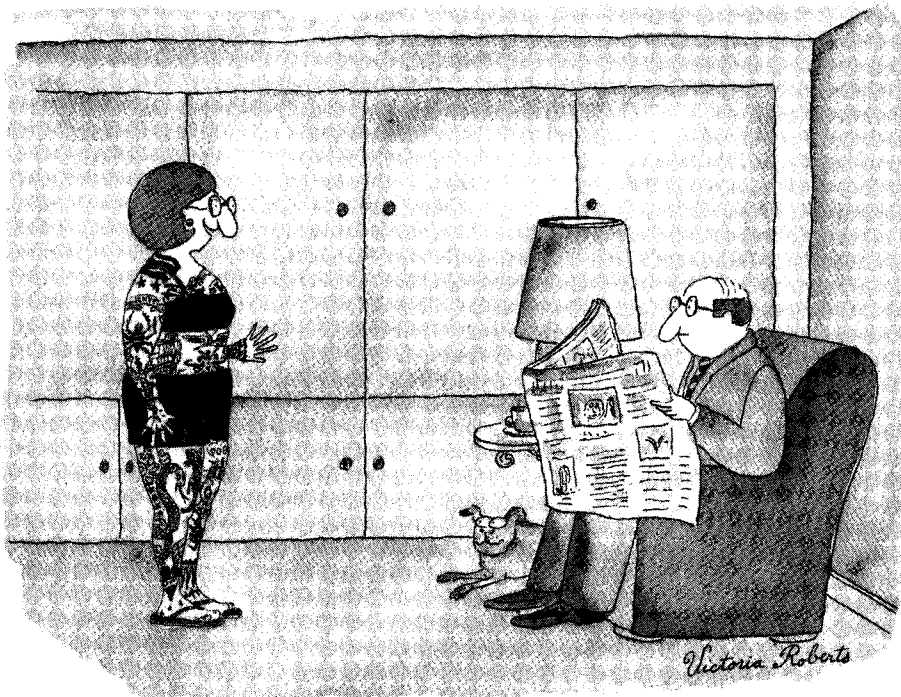
WHILE others are splashing about in the ocean, two energetic young women are having the best of times here in Manhattan, in Washington Heights. They are having more fun than any vacation could give them, for, at the ages of twenty-three and twenty-five, they have been put in charge of an education program for children, funded by the federal government to the tune of a hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars. It is an ambitious program, spanning eight weeks of July and August and involving two hundred children from one of the city's poorest neighborhoods in a dazzling variety of educational and community activities. The two women, Giulia Cox and Gillian Williams, have a staff of approximately fifty people, all between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. Half of them are teachers, almost all of whom belong to Teach for America, a privately funded organization that seeks

out college graduates with a vocation to teach, gives them some training, and then places them in the nation's neediest public schools, where they are committed to stay for two years. The other half are college-bound seniors from New York City public high schools.

Ms. Cox and Ms. Williams, who are alumnae of the Teach for America corps and have been teaching in public schools in the neighborhood, are beneficiaries of President Clinton's drive to expand national service in the United States. Theirs is one of sixteen Summer of Service programs around the country—three of them in New York City—that are being funded by the Commission on National and Community Service, a federal agency in Washington. But, according to Ms. Williams, their program is unique. "There is nothing standard about it," she says. "It's a very visionary program. It's a model for a new kind of school." Ms. Williams, the older and more forceful of the partners, does not suffer from false modesty; rather, she has an abundance of self-confidence and determination. A tall, athletic-looking woman, she was reared on a farm in upstate New York and studied sociology at Columbia University, where she acquired her vocation to teach.

She and Ms. Cox, a sociology graduate of Bryn Mawr, wrote their grant proposal—one of four hundred and thirty-six eventually received by the government—during two weeks in March, doing so under the mistaken impression that you had to be twenty-five or under to apply, whereas in fact the age restriction was intended only for people employed by a Summer of Service program, and not for its proposers or managers. Despite competition from seasoned professionals in the community-service field, their program was accepted, and since July 5th they have been running it out of a small second-floor office in Intermediate School 218, at the corner of Broadway and 196th Street, which is a flagship school in Community School District 6—the district from which all the children in the program have been drawn.

The children range from fourth graders to eighth graders, and they reflect the demographics of Washington Heights, where more than sixty-three per cent of the people are Hispanic, including large numbers of recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic. The essence of the



"It's all right, Howard. They're all stick-ons."

program is to try to teach basic skills—reading, writing, math, and science—almost by stealth, not for their own sake but as tools for investigating topics of relevance (sometimes painful relevance) to the students and their communities, concerning the health and environmental problems of New York. The students have been divided into twenty-four “learning teams,” in each of which six to eight students, supervised by one teacher and one high-school senior, have selected their own collective project. In one classroom last week, a team was researching AIDS and H.I.V., coming up with questions and then finding out and writing down the answers. (“HIV virus can only be transmitted through blood and seaman,” one ten-year-old had written.) In another classroom, sixteen children from two teams were concentrating fixedly on sixteen computer screens. One team, calling itself the Junkbusters, was investigating nutrition; the other, the Water Coolers, was studying wastewater, and that project had already involved a visit to the stinking sewage plant beneath Riverbank State Park.

All the while, the children have to scribble away—writing daily journals, letters to their parents, statements of their aims, logs of their accomplishments, assessments of their communities. These writings will go into portfolios for subsequent evaluation. “We’ve completely suckered them,” Ms. Williams says contentedly. She is a practical woman, who appears ideally suited for community work in a multiracial environment, both because she is fluent in Spanish and because she was brought up with four adopted brothers and sisters, two of whom are African-Americans. This makes her impatient of theoretical debate on issues such as diversity and multiculturalism, and she was not happy about the way these subjects were discussed, in groups of thirty, during a national training week organized by the government in June, in San Francisco, for all fifteen hundred participants in the Summer of Service programs. There was an atmosphere of tension and false intimacy about the meetings, she says. “Because I come from a biracial family, I’ve had to think about these things all my life,” she says. “I can’t sit down for two hours and explain this to a bunch of strangers.” Fortunately, in Washington Heights no explaining is required. ♦

HOME WRECKER

RECENTLY, my friend Gene asked if I’d let a friend of his use my apartment while I was away. I declined, and then, later, he mentioned that the person needing a place to stay happened to be Tina Turner. I was sorry I’d said no, because, even though I don’t know Tina personally, I had just seen the movie about her—“What’s Love Got to Do with It”—and I think that it would have been cool to have her stay in my apartment.

It’s a two-bedroom on the Upper West Side, which I have decorated as if it were owned by a mid-ranking official of the Chinese Communist Party. I like how it’s turned out. However, I don’t know if it would be to Tina’s liking. In the movie, Ike and Tina’s apartment (or mansion, or whatever) has a different

look from mine, but maybe Ike did their decorating.

I’m a size 2, and I bet that Tina is also a 2, or maybe a 4 on her fat days. I’m sure she’d end up rummaging around in my closet—something I ordinarily wouldn’t like, but I’d *love* to be the person who turned Tina on to J. Crew plain-front relaxed-fit khakis. On the other hand, if she visited on a fat day and tried something of mine on and split a seam, would she fix it? Or would she hide it and hope I’d never notice? Or—worst of all—would she throw the ruined outfit away and then let me spend the next year of my life trying to figure out where I lost my pants? I’d hate having to worry that some celebrity who hadn’t worked out her shame-and-denial issues was going to be destroying my stuff and then pretending it had never happened.

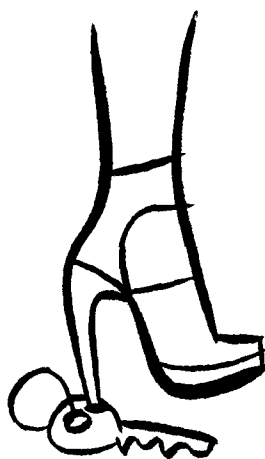
Also: Does Tina Turner cook? I’ll bet that she doesn’t cook a lot but that she has mastered one fancy party dish—something that’s not actually hard to make but looks complicated, like smoked-bluefish pâté or nachos. It’s become her sig-

nature dish: whenever she goes to potlucks, people see her coming up the driveway and instead of saying “Hey, here comes Tina” they say “Hey, here comes that smoked-bluefish pâté” or “Here come the nachos.” Anyway, my kitchen is typical for New York City, so there wouldn’t be much for her to see, except that I have one cupboard absolutely loaded with cans of water-packed tuna. This could have a downside. It might tempt her to

just “borrow” a few cans, with every intention of replacing them at some future date, and we all know how often guests spend their vacation running to the grocery store to replace what they’ve filched. The answer is: Not very often. I also have these great boar-bristle hairbrushes that I think a show-

business person with a lot of hair and an elevated hair consciousness—e.g., Tina Turner—would adore. Unfortunately, I’m not crazy about sharing combs and brushes—this is something I was taught as a child—but if Tina had just shampooed and had forgotten her own stuff she would probably use them, even if I had specifically asked her not to. No comment. I’ve done it myself.

I think my neighbors would like Tina, but I’m not sure they’d like her clattering around the apartment in those spike-heeled pumps of hers. I would have to ask her to limit her clattering—she could borrow my socks if she wanted to, but I would appreciate their being washed afterward. Moreover, if she had friends over—I’m assuming her friends also wear noisy shoes—she’d have to insist that they also take theirs off, but they’d have to bring their own socks. If she’s too uncomfortable to ask them to do something like that, then maybe she ought to get new friends, or maybe she should look for somewhere else to stay. Isn’t that what hotels are for? —SUSAN ORLEAN





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OUR FOOTLOOSE CORRESPONDENTS

HEIDI'S OUTTAKES

Heidi Fleiss isn't yet naming all the names in her little black book, but everyone else in Hollywood is.

BY MARK SINGER

"So the rumors are true?"
"Rumors are always true. You know that."
—From Michael Tolkin's screenplay for *"The Player,"* directed by Robert Altman.

HAVING sex is an honorable California tradition. When I say this, I am not indulging in wishful or fanciful inference. During a recent six-day visit to Los Angeles, I elicited testimonials from many credible individuals who candidly acknowledged or in unmistakable terms implied that from

Southern California. Until her picture turned up on the front page of the August 1st edition of the Los Angeles Times, illustrating a three-thousand-word article, Heidi was not well known. In the larger scheme, she was just another ambitious young career person doing what needed to be done to keep up the payments on a demanding piece of real estate—in this instance, a gated house in Benedict Canyon that, in a decent market, would go for a million six—and, like a lot of other hardworking citizens, not getting everything that she felt she had coming to her.

Heidi's only previous appearance in the L.A. Times had occurred in mid-June, in a nine-inch article on page 3 of the Metro section. That story, which was written by Shawn Hubler



time to time they have copulated. Quite often, human reproduction has not been the goal or the consequence of this behavior. These people have been having sex for various personal reasons. I have airline-ticket, hotel, restaurant, and parking receipts to prove that I conducted this field research, and I have notes gleaned from interviews and my own ruminations. One afternoon, I spent a few hours poolside at my hotel, pretending to read a magazine while actually engaging in extended speculation about why the young woman on the adjacent chaise was sunbathing topless. Otherwise, I was hitting the phones hard and doing serious journalistic legwork.

What had brought me here was Heidi Lynne Fleiss, who at the moment is the most brightly illuminated celebrity in

and headlined "BEVERLY HILLS STING TARGETS CALL GIRL RING," noted that Heidi, "a mercurial, rail-thin brunette" who was twenty-seven years old, had been arrested on "felony pimping, pandering, and narcotics charges." Her "alleged clientele" was "said to run from international financiers to movie stars and sheiks." The narcotics involved were thirteen grams of cocaine that a Beverly Hills undercover police officer, driving a Ferrari Testarossa and posing as "a wealthy Japanese businessman," was alleged to have ordered from Heidi along with four fifteen-hundred-dollar-a-night prostitutes. The undercover officer had been introduced to Heidi by a friend from high school. "I had a bad feeling about him, but [the friend] kept saying: 'No, he's a great guy, he drives

LEE LORENZ

a Testarossa and everything,' Heidi told Hubler.

"I'll tell you a true fact," a screenwriter assured me the other day. "This is not a rumor. The undercover cop comes from such a rich family that that's his own car. That was not a rental."

At the time of Heidi's arrest, Shawn Hubler had been acquainted with her for quite a while, and so had a few other journalists and writers in Los Angeles. Heidi, without exactly courting publicity, did not shrink from the possibility. Hubler had first interviewed and quoted her, but without identifying her by name, in a December, 1992, story about some jewelry that had been stolen from a Beverly Hills woman named Elizabeth Adams. In the late eighties, Adams—a.k.a. Madam Alex and generally known to be the most formidable procurer in Beverly Hills, in the same way that Tommy Lasorda is generally known to be the manager of the Dodgers—had been forced into retirement by the Los Angeles County district attorney.

Heidi and Madam Alex have what Hubler has described as an "on-again, off-again" relationship. Madam Alex has said that she became acquainted with Heidi when Heidi worked for her as a prostitute, and a Los Angeles Police Department search-warrant affidavit has described Heidi as "Elizabeth Adams' No. 1 'girl' until she broke off . . . to start her own prostitution business." When Hubler tracked Heidi down for a quote about the stolen jewels—the theft of which, contrary to Madam Alex's suspicion, Heidi turned out to have had nothing to do with—Heidi emphasized her management skills. "Look, I know Madam Alex was great at what she did," Heidi said, "but it's like this: What took her years to build, I built in one. The high end is the high end, and no one has a higher end than me—or than I did."

Madam Alex was born in Manila to a Spanish-Filipino mother and a German father. Heidi, who is Jewish, had a schoolteacher mother and a pediatrician father and a childhood in Los Feliz, a gentrifying residential neighborhood tucked between Hollywood and Burbank. Madam Alex had used a variety of aliases. There were people in The Industry whose children had been treated by Dr. Fleiss. Heidi was a type an L.A. *Times* reader could, in a comfortable way, recognize. There was at least one other meaningful distinction between Madam Alex and

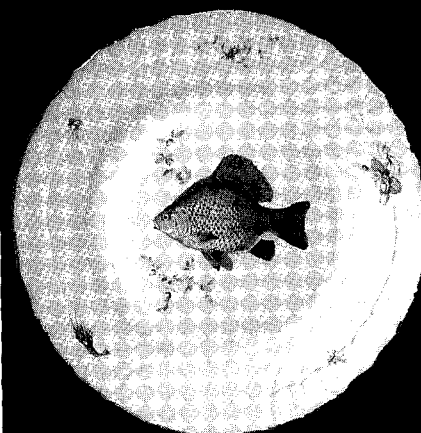
Heidi: Madam Alex never threatened to disclose the names of her clients.

THE August 1st story in the *Times*, which anointed Heidi "madam to the stars," and whose byline Hubler shared with James Bates, seemed to name names but then—well, didn't. Hubler says it was vetted by seven editors and two lawyers. The most readily recognizable names appeared in the second paragraph: Jack Nicholson; Mick Jagger; Billy Idol; Peter Sellers' daughter, Victoria; and Robert Evans. Nicholson merited a mention because he is part owner of the Monkey Bar, a restaurant where Heidi likes to hang out. Jagger qualified because a raucous party had once been thrown for him at Heidi's house, which, it was noted, had been previously owned by Michael Douglas. Billy Idol's publicist said that Idol had met Heidi "but doesn't know her well." Victoria Sellers is a close pal of Heidi's. The story quoted Evans as saying, "I haven't spoken to her for some time. Call my press agent." The press agent described Heidi as "a family friend." A few days later, Evans, who at different moments in his gravity-prone career has had to acknowledge that he is a substance abuser and deny that he is an accomplice to murder, was back in the paper, complaining, "I'm the one guy in town who's never touched her and never seen any of her girls. And yet I'm the only one mentioned. Why, I don't know."

A couple of names that didn't ring bells turned up: Dan Hanks, a private detective; and Ivan Nagy, a marginal director of TV movies and action shows. Hanks was offering for sale an audiotape of conversations originally recorded by someone who had wiretapped Heidi's telephone after her arrest; for six thousand dollars, Heidi had bought a copy to use in her defense. Nagy, who was twice Heidi's age, was a former boyfriend and current nemesis. A peculiar triangular animosity existed between Nagy, Heidi, and Madam Alex, and Heidi was said to be delighted when, on August 4th, Nagy was himself busted for pandering.

Even more significant were names that had been floating around town since Heidi's arrest and that the *Times* had declined to publish: Box-Office Heavyweights with Equally Famous Wives, and Powerful Studio Executives caught up in scenarios worthy of Jacqueline Susann or Jackie Collins at their most shameless. The most incendiary scenario

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involved the possibility that studio funds might have gone to pay for prostitutes. "Most writers live off development money," said the screenwriter with the lowdown on the Testarossa. "The deal memo never mentions a half ounce of cocaine and a blow job. It's tough enough to get a development deal without being knocked out by a line item for hookers."

The studio that became the focus of this sort of speculation was Columbia Pictures, which is owned by Sony Pictures Entertainment. The day before Nagy was arrested, an attorney for Michael Nathanson, who is now an executive vice-president at Columbia, issued a public denial that his client had any connection to Heidi. (Months earlier, Nathanson had retained a private detective named Anthony Pellicano to trace the source of rumors about him.) The attorney acknowledged that Nathanson knew Nagy "professionally." Heidi, meanwhile, was telling the *Times* that when "she was dating Nagy . . . the two of them would occasionally socialize with Nathanson." Nathanson's maladroit attempt at spin control was not doing his bosses any good. The chairman of Columbia is Mark Canton, who, depending upon who is doing the talking, is "well liked," "a guileless yuppie schmuck," "feral more than yuppie," "an uncritical enthusiast," or "the person everyone in Hollywood loves to hate in the hope that no one will notice that they're very similar to him." In the rumor mill, what started out as audiotapes had a tendency to become videotapes. What started out as Nathanson became Nathanson and Canton and Peter Guber, the chairman and chief executive officer of Sony Pictures Entertainment. What started out as a vice sting with an Asian-American undercover cop in a starring role became a bunch of Sony International executives in handcuffs. As yet, however, no one had produced a smoking checkbook. As yet, none of this had, as they say, jumped the highway.

THE notion that someone out there had a sinister desire to sabotage Columbia Pictures seemed entirely plausible, and so did the notion that the saboteurs might be Columbia employees. It is commonly understood that the only time people in Hollywood wish you well and mean it is when you have a terminal disease. As grains of truth mutated and metastasized into lurid fantasy, the Schadenfreude became palpable on the

premises of Warner Brothers, M-G-M, Fox, Universal, Paramount, and Disney, where, because it was California, people were having sex or contemplating having sex, but definitely not the dirty kind.

"We're talking sex addiction," an acquaintance of mine explained, informing me in ex-cathedra tones that a Well-Known Producer and a Famous Actor Whose Father Was a Famous Actor had recently spent time at a clinic in Tucson being subjected, as it were, to therapeutic withdrawal.

I tried this one out on a wanna-be starlet: Was sex addiction possible? She assured me that it was. "If it feels anything like shopping," she said, "I can, like, totally relate."

Late one night, a friend escorted me to a club where, I was promised, some of Heidi's employees would show up. If they ever did arrive, I wouldn't have been able to see them through the haze of cigarette smoke. Nor, because of the loudness of the music, could we have enjoyed a thoughtful discussion of the fate of the North American Free Trade Agreement. I did, however, luck into a stimulating conversation with a young woman who knew Heidi well. After explaining that she herself had coined the phrase "If you're not part of the solution you're part of the problem" and that, years earlier, it had been appropriated by others, the young woman delivered a lecture that moved from starvation in Africa to whales and then on to Rodney King, homelessness, and the bankruptcy of the health-care system, and ended up with "There are two things that make the world go round—money and pussy—and not necessarily in that order." I took out my notebook and wrote that down.

There's an upbeat sense that Heidi has managed to pull Los Angeles together, that she has given the town a lift it's needed ever since last year's riots. Clearly, however, moments have arisen when the strain has been too great for her to bear—the most noteworthy being when Heidi made a temperamental threat, during a hostile conversation with a reporter from *Variety*, to sell her "black book" to a publisher for a million dollars. She did not dwell on the practicalities of such an agreement. Anyway, she later told Hubler, she regretted the outburst.

The fact is, however, that Heidi has been naming names, and women who have worked for her have been naming names, to certain reporters for more than

a year. In June of 1992, she started having conversations with John H. Richardson, a writer for *Premiere*. Richardson had previously published what he describes as "an environmental piece" about "a couple of women who came out here to be actresses and ended up as hookers." Along the way, he met Madam Alex—because everyone meets Madam Alex. "Through a friend," he met Heidi, who was brimming with unflattering remarks about Ivan Nagy. Richardson was pursuing a story about Michael Nathanson. That story, which Richardson says was in many respects "generated by Heidi," was killed by his editors late last year. "At the time, I reluctantly agreed, but I now think they were right," Richardson told me. There were "mitigating circumstances" that inclined him toward sympathy for Nathanson.

Jeff Wells, a freelance writer whose work appears in *Entertainment Weekly*, the *L.A. Times*, and *Us*, picked up more or less where Richardson had left off, and eventually found himself on the receiving end of stern letters from an attorney representing Nathanson as well as chillingly unfriendly attention from Anthony Pellicano. Wells, it should be pointed out, is reviled at Columbia, where, because of an article he wrote for the *L.A. Times* in June about a mysterious screening that the studio denies took place, he is regarded as single-handedly responsible for the stillbirth of "Last Action Hero," the hundred-million-dollar Arnold Schwarzenegger fiasco.

At some point last year, Richardson introduced Heidi to a neophyte screenwriter named Matt Tabak. In the *Times*' August 1st article, Tabak was described as offering Heidi three hundred thousand dollars for a thirty-day option on her life story. A friend of Tabak's says he has already completed a resistible script that features a Heidi-like madam who has a romance with a cop. No sooner had the option offer been reported in the *Times* than Tabak elected to become incommunicado. "He's terrified that people will think he was going to name names, and it will destroy his career," his friend said.

Premiere, meanwhile, has been publishing in serial form a novel by Richardson titled "The Blue Screen." A lot of real people have walk-on roles in "The Blue Screen," which Richardson describes as being about "the sadomasochistic psychological relationship between a producer and his assistant." In

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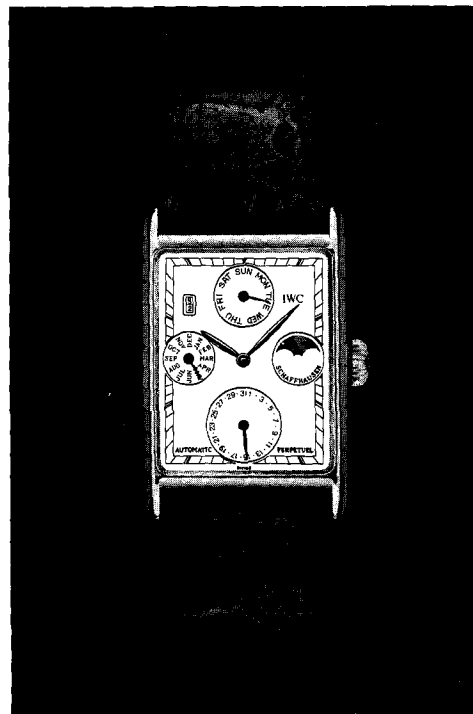
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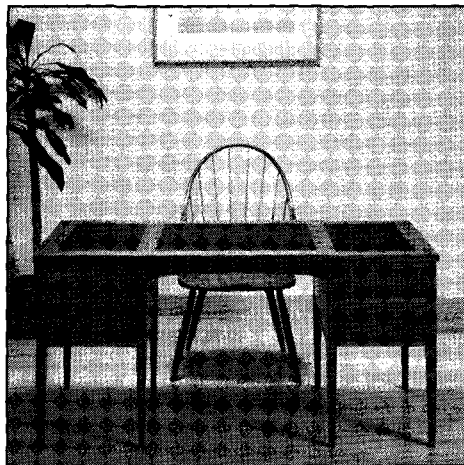
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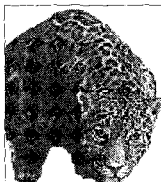
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the current issue, Jeff Wells appears in a cameo, as "a media pest who made his mud pies out of Columbia dirt." In one of the running subplots, two rival Hollywood madams make life difficult for each other by leaking rumors to the press.

As madams go, Madam Alex has been good enough copy to share her reminiscences with a writer named William Stadiem, who recently delivered to Random House a nonfiction manuscript titled "Madam 90210." Stadiem, who is feeling sanguine about the book's prospects, says it portrays "the world of deluxe prostitution in Beverly Hills." The book was originally supposed to be published in the spring of 1994—"but at the rate things are going, it's going to be like 'Raid on Entebbe.'" When I asked Stadiem how he was proceeding with the fact-checking of his book, he said, "You can't check the truth. There is no truth. It's all he-said, she-said. In terms of hard, cold facts, you'll never know."

THE media mob that gathered at the Municipal Court building the day of Heidi's arraignment, on August 9th, had the approximate dimensions of the horde covering a visit by the Pope.

Heidi wore a taupe Norma Kamali dress with shoulder pads, a gold necklace, dark glasses, and an expression that indicated mild bemusement. Victoria Sellers and an actress-model-whatever named Bonita Money sat behind her in the courtroom and succeeded in scoring some ink and some air time. They said they had come to offer "moral encouragement." Heidi's attorney, Anthony Brooklier, a Harry Hamlin type in a gray chalk-striped suit, did the talking, pleading Heidi not guilty on all counts. A preliminary hearing was set for September 10th. The D.A. asked the judge to raise Heidi's bail from a hundred thousand dollars to a hundred and thirty-five thousand. The judge declined after Brooklier explained that she was unlikely to flee, because she was "a virtual prisoner in her house since the publicity started in this matter."

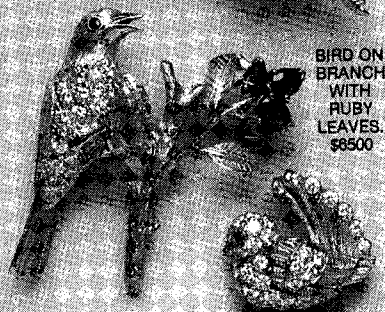
A friend of Heidi's had told me, "Heidi's very much of a home person. She's at home in her sweats, on the couch, watching TV, with the phone ringing. There's this black phone on the coffee table that's constantly ringing. Except for the Monkey Bar, Heidi doesn't go east of La Cienega. I'm telling you, she's a homey girl." ♦

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PERSONAL HISTORY

MENTORS

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

LONG before I was sent away to boarding school, there was Miss Quirke. She was the successor of my earliest teachers: the nuns in Youghal, a Miss Willoughby in Skibbereen, and the National School in Tipperary. My mother declared that the last named was educationally inadequate, and she was probably right. While attending it I was entered for a nationwide Church of Ireland examination in religious knowledge, and assured beyond doubt that this would result in my acquiring a silver medal. With a boy called Hadnett, I sat for a whole morning in Canon Stringer's study in the rectory, plied with ginger beer by the elderly clergyman and his wife. My knowledge of the Bible was scant: I was unable to supply information about the engrafted word that saves souls, or Shimri the son of Shemaiah, or what happened when Zipporah took a sharp stone. In the end, Canon Stringer told me a thing or two and I wrote them down. Then he left us on our own, and Hadnett, who had finished and was examining the contents of a drawer, told me another thing or two, which I wrote down also. Unfortunately, Hadnett knew as little as I did, and when the same misunderstandings were later noted as emanating from the same rectory we were both disqualified. My mother said the whole thing was a farce, and a yardstick of the school's ineptitude when it came to assessing its pupils' potential. A failed Christian Brother, at a loose end in the town, was engaged to come daily to an upstairs room of our house in Main Street and instruct my brother and myself. John Joe he was called, but he turned out not to be suitable, mainly because after a week or so he declared he couldn't manage on the wages. So John Joe left and Miss Quirke replaced him.

She had been found in a farmhouse at Oola, a few miles from Tipperary, where she'd been vaguely waiting for something to happen, as many a country girl was at that time. Fair-haired, pink-cheeked, she was probably little more

than a schoolgirl, although she seemed old and wise. Her soft, solemn smile and calm voice, her unhurried movements, her modesty, her confidence, all supported this impression.

Every morning she rode in on her bicycle, a breath of fresh air from Oola. Often she came with brambles or sprigs of birch and oak snapped from the hedges. These were arranged on the table in front of my brother and me, and we were instructed to paint them in watercolors. On other days, poster paint was produced, ink was mixed with glue, and patterns were made with combs cut from cardboard. We were told about the continental Sunday, and the guillotine and the Champs-Élysées. We were shown pictures of baguettes and *ficelles*, so very different from our own dreary pan loaves and turnovers. Joan of Arc and Niall of the Nine Hostages were rescued from the dust that had years ago settled on them. Mathematical subjects were less distasteful than they had been. Even geography had its moments, though admittedly not many.

Patiently, without anger, errors and aberrations were corrected, a Relief nib forever dipping into the bottle of Stephens' red ink Miss Quirke uncorked every morning when she sat down. Her composure was the more startling the more it was in evidence, her knowledge seemingly endless. She knew why rain came down in drops. She knew the names of clouds, and how to bind a book, and the exact town in America where the electric chair had been invented, and by whom, and whose life it had first claimed. She knew the names of the Chicago gangsters, and that the story of William Tell was a myth, and that it was all nonsense about St. George and the dragon. She described the Famine ships that had taken the starving Irish across the Atlantic, how every day more bodies had been dropped over the side, how only the fortunate had survived. She read "Lorna Doone" aloud.

Before she arrived one morning, my

brother and I placed a windup Hornby train engine in the drawer of the table at which our lessons were conducted. We attached a string to one of its levers and trailed the string through a hole bored in the bottom of the drawer, through a cup hook screwed into the floor beneath, along the skirting-board, and beneath the door. At eleven o'clock, when tea and Everyday biscuits were brought to Miss Quirke, we were released from the upstairs room for ten minutes or so. On the landing the string was jerked, the lever released, and the clockwork engine began its drone in the drawer. Overcome by our wit, we jammed our fists into our mouths, imagining her flustered bewilderment once she had recovered from the shock. When we reentered the room, still red-faced from sniggering, Miss Quirke was reading the *Irish Independent*, as she always was when we returned from our ten minutes. She was smiling over Curly Wee and Gussie Goose. "Awfully good today," she said, and read it out.

One Saturday afternoon she was in the back row of the balcony at the new Excel Cinema, with a man. This interested us greatly, and we kept turning round to see if they were cuddling, but it was impossible to make out anything in the dark. The man wore a suit and had a mustache, and was offering her a cigarette when the lights went up. We watched them mounting their bicycles and riding off. "Was he your brother?" we planned to inquire, nonchalantly, on Monday morning, but we never did, because she mentioned the encounter first, saying that the film we'd seen—Mickey Rooney as the young Thomas Edison—was historically inaccurate, and proceeding to adjust it for us.

Miss Quirke was an influence for no more than a few months, but the memory of her wisdom insistently lingers. When the news came that we were to move from Tipperary to Enniscorthy, she made us draw a map and mark on it where Enniscorthy was, to state in the margin what its longitude and latitude were, to discover and write down its population. She told us about the Battle of Vinegar Hill, and explained that County Wexford wasn't at all like County Tipperary, being affected to this day by Viking settlements. Wexford people were called Kulchies, she said. The pronunciation of certain words in

Irish would be different in County Wexford. She read us the lines of a Wexford song, "Kelly the Boy from Killann," a rousing evocation of our woeful national struggle in the southeast corner of Ireland.

Learning was never again to be as calm or as agreeable as it was in that upstairs room with Miss Quirke. Yet to come was all that disappointment in the eyes of weary schoolmasters, and textbooks thrown, verbal abuse, physical attack. Miss Quirke just taught.

Mary Quirke she was. A Christmas card came, with holly drawn just as she had demonstrated, berries dotted in with modest panache. Was she no more than seventeen when she rode in every day from Oola? Was she in love with the man with the mustache when she paused to fill the basket of her bicycle with sprigs from the hedges? Again her Relief nib dips into the bottle of Stephens' red ink, again her soft voice forgives yet another foolish mistake. Did ever she come to know the Champs-Élysées, or did she simply slip back into the County Tipperary landscape? Of all the people I have ever known, Miss Quirke deserved the Champs-Élysées.

I COULDN'T, I protested. I wasn't deft with my hands. I couldn't even draw. "Oh, just get on with it," Kelly, an exasperated art master at St. Columba's, ordered when I'd been at the school a week or so, a late arrival at fifteen. "Just do it, for God's sake!"

And I did it, because at least it would be a change from traipsing over the hillsides in search of a rock or a clump of gorse to sketch or going to see what the ram was up to. What I had agreed to do instead was to carve an eagle in low relief. Any-one could, Kelly impatiently insisted.

He was wrong. If the chisel wasn't sharp enough, it tore at the wood, leaving it shredded and hairy. Sharpening the chisel was a knack, and carving with it was a knack. The more you hacked,



the less the carefully pencilled outline resembled a proud bird of prey. Perspective disappeared. If you didn't clamp the wood firmly enough it slipped about, resisting all attentions; if you tightened the clamps they left an ugly indentation. If you dealt the chisel too powerful a blow with the trickily rounded mallet the eagle's claws weren't there anymore. If you didn't look after your fingers they wouldn't be there either. Most of the time there was blood all over the place.

But there was something about the arduous, unsatisfactory activity that was appealing. When a delicate little gauge was as sharp as a razor, it slipped pleasantly through the grain of the wood, and for an instant or two you could control it perfectly. The grain was a pattern to make use of, a means of suggesting concavity or depth, an emphasis when you wanted it to be. In time—five or six weeks—I finished the eagle, and Kelly advised me simply to polish it with beeswax, but I chose, instead, to plaster on raw linseed oil, which had the effect of bringing out all the flaws. Kelly said I'd ruined it.

"A Place for Everything and Everything in Its Place" was inscribed on the art-room wall, Kelly being a tidy, matter-of-fact man. Pill Kelly he was known as—a way of intimating that he was not as popular as his flamboyant predecessor had been. He didn't have a beard then, and he signed his watercolors "Austen Kelly." But in the autumn of that year he ceased to shave and changed his Christian name to Oisín. In addition to teaching art, he taught French and Irish, and was generally considered to be well below average at conveying the rudiments of both. He was, as he often said himself, in it for the money.

In the art room he didn't fulsomely encourage. His example of doing rather than thinking, his dislike of the amateur, his distrust of philosophy, of the cerebral and the academic, weren't thrust upon you: they were there; you shared them or you didn't; you stood on your own two feet. He was impatient and tetchy and down-to-earth. You weren't put into the world to be pampered. If you wanted to learn, listen to what was being said to you; if you didn't, no one else was going to fret.

Kelly would ride about the place on a fat old farm horse, seeming happy up there, far removed from the rudiments of French and Irish. In the art room he

offered shortcuts, tricks of the trade, skills that could be acquired. Art itself, he knew without ever saying, could not be taught. He was angered by charm and mess, and sometimes pondered his own prickliness in this respect. "I should go into a pub more often," he used to say. "Maybe pick up a few social graces." But he couldn't be bothered with the chattering life. He hated wasting time, and any kind of palaver; he was a man of the people. "Find yourself a set of chisels," he grumbled when carving became an obsession with me. "You can't go on blunting mine."

I found some in Enniscorthy, the property of an elderly woman who didn't use them anymore, their boxwood handles unaffected by years of impact. Kelly admired them, as he did anything of quality.

"My God!" his keen response was when the headmaster's daughter passed by the art-room window. "Hasn't she the lovely buttocks!"

I visited Kelly on Sunday mornings in his house in Templeogue, where I would play about with chunks of clay in the conservatory he used as a studio. He sang "The Old Orange Flute" or "The Wearin' o' the Green" while he worked, or grumbled about the sounding of bells that controlled his daily life. The conservatory wasn't suitable for the purpose he put it to and was eventually abandoned in favor of a studio he rented in Dublin, for which he acquired cutlery and crockery in the school dining hall, surreptitiously slipping one article at a time under his gown at the end of each meal. "Anyone looking?" he would inquire of the tableful of boys placed in his charge.

Oisín Kelly became one of Ireland's most distinguished sculptors, and escaped eventually from the summons of bells. Before he did so, I telephoned him one day in search of some advice; my fondness for carving hadn't quieted down, and I was considering becoming a professional letter cutter. There was a silence when I mentioned advice, then came the suggestion that maybe what I wanted was information. I should have known. Advice is vague, no better than opinion, not to be trusted. Information is fact; you know where you are with it. As it turned out, he gave me neither. People should make up their own minds, his reticence declared; ridiculous to ask someone else to do it for

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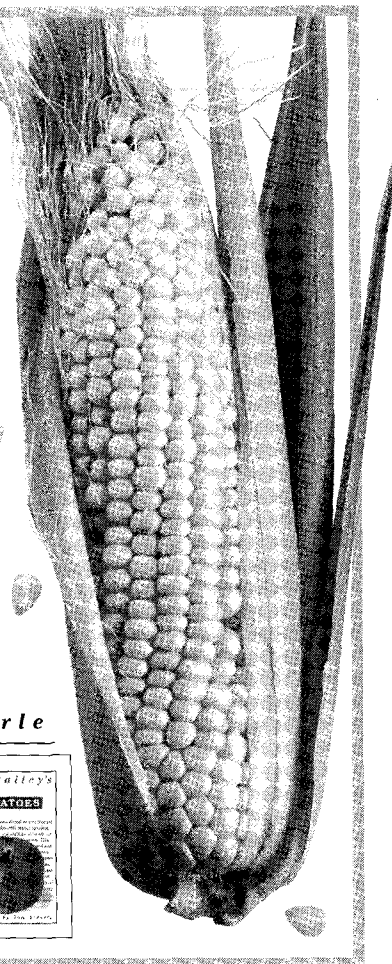
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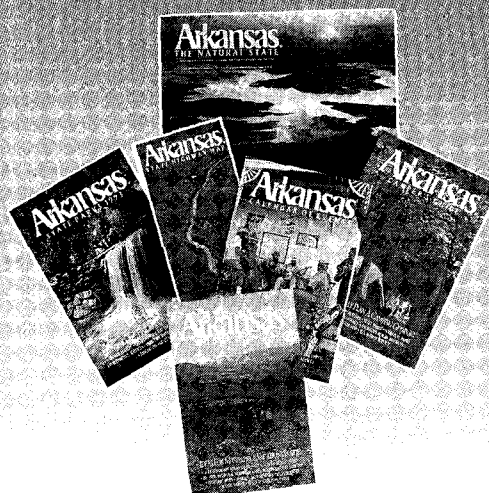
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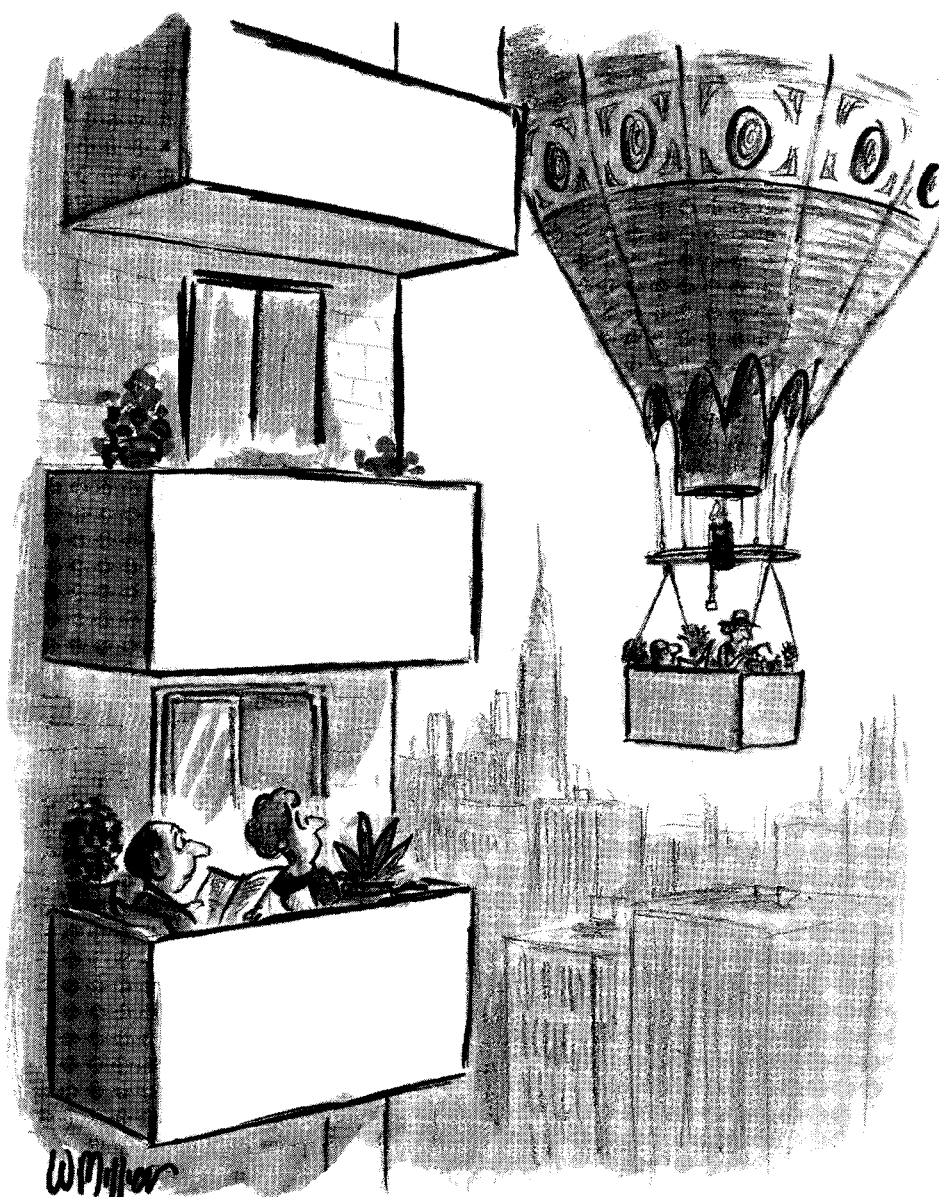
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them. Stand on your own two feet; no point in possessing them otherwise.

R. E. C. BROWNE delivered a famous sermon in which he likened Christ to a Wild West sheriff arriving to "clean up the town." He was the Chaplain, a big, good-hearted man with a bothersome stutter, who taught English and divinity and trained the rugby team. He bought biscuits wholesale, in huge square tins, offering them when he invited you to coffee. He was considered something of a fool.

"Come to coffee," he would say, and you'd go because coffee was a treat and because of the biscuits. The invitation was usually issued in the evening, after

prep. In summer the shadows would deepen in his study until you couldn't see him anymore and you could reach out for the biscuit tin unobserved while he invoked Ezra Pound. "Language is made of concrete things" was a favorite repetition, followed by the Pound maxim about general expressions being a laziness.

Lines from Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Robert Graves would merge in the gloom. Or there were references to accidie and concupiscence, and you didn't know if this was nonsense or not, but somehow assumed it was.

"A patient etherised upon a table," R. E. C. Browne would murmur at you on some other occasion, his greeting in a

bustling corridor. For those he knew from the rugby field there were other greetings, and other conversations over coffee; it was said that he went in for establishing wavelengths, but we dismissed the effort as we dismissed him too. "The winter evening settles down," he would passingly declare, his stutter eased by the rhythm of the words, "with smell of steaks in passageways."

One side of him was unequivocally respected: he had no difficulty keeping order and stood no nonsense. No one mocked him to his face, as old Daddy Evelyn—another clergyman on the staff—was mocked, or le Clerc, the geography man. With the Chaplain we trod warily without ever knowing why, and although his halting delivery was endlessly mimicked it never occurred to any of us that he was aware of the mild amusement he inadvertently provided, and didn't care. Or that he knew the coffee and biscuits were the attraction, and didn't care either.

In retrospect all that is clearer. Adolescence is often too concerned with itself to see much beyond the boundaries of its own few years; its muddle and haste and self-protecting instinct are blinding. We saw only a surface of this chaplain who practiced public speaking with an audience of one, over coffee and biscuits. Half listened to, he tried his theories out or repeated, yet again, lines and words that nagged him.

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

As if for fun, he defined magnanimity and malice, remorse, repentance, righteousness, hypocrisy, and hope. In fact, it was not for fun: twenty years later his definitions appeared as thirty-nine short articles in "A Dictionary of Christian Ethics." Eliot and Marianne Moore, Graves and Auden are there in his writings, too. Possessor of goodness or hearty God botherer, he found it hard simply to accept: the truth mattered most of all to him.

He passed us by, as the truth so often did, too, unwelcome at that nervous time of life. Yet it was there, as hindsight shows, among his wasted definitions, lighting his perceptions of toler-

ance and vice, of honor, cruelty, and prudence, hubris and humility. He was no prophet, he believed, but at least had seen the eternal Footman hold his coat and snicker, which is the next-best thing.

He wrote to me twenty years later as to a stranger, not connecting the author of a radio play of mine with a boy he'd once fed biscuits to. I wondered who this clergyman could be, who expressed himself with such needling insight, then realized—to astonishment, dismay, and shame. His voice was a vivid echo then, free of its stutter:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politick, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

ECCENTRICITY when it is tediously pretended is born of a search for identity, as hell-raising, or a deviant stance of one kind or another, often is. Genuine eccentrics, though, hardly know what they are, obscurely going their way in shadowy suburbs, noticed by only a few. The world they look out at is too gray for them: the peculiarities that come to govern their lives may even keep certifiable insanity at bay; often they merely fear boredom. An elderly Italian was possessed of a compulsion to live on trains, irrespective of where they were going, and did so for the greater part of a long life. A Miss Gilly, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, believed it was unwise to wash the left side of the body. A Sheffield man considered it necessary to sleep with a piece of string beneath his pillow. William Ponsonby-Barker, an Ascendancy figure in nineteenth-century Ireland, selected a maidservant at evening prayers to accompany him to bed as his hot-water bottle, justifying the oddity on the scriptural precedent of King David. The fourteenth Baron Berners chose to irritate his neighbors by erecting, at great expense, a useless tower. A cat lover held up the rebuilding of Coventry by refusing to vacate his house, on the ground that his two hundred flea-infested companions would suffer distress if they were moved.

As a housemaster is no doubt obliged to be, Frig Allt was milder in his eccen-

tricitics. Clean and fair-haired, with untidy shirt collars, he had a particular stride, moving swiftly and swinging a little from side to side. His biggish face was unobtrusively handsome—the kind of looks that fade in the memory because they don't register strongly at the time. He smoked a large pipe, sometimes cigarettes, and drank a great deal of water. His abstracted air was attributed to the fact that he was known to be working on the variorum edition of W. B. Yeats.

One of his colleagues held that the only way to keep the upper hand was, each year in each class, to pick on a boy who threatened to give trouble and blame him for everything, whether he was guilty or not. Others let the upper hand slip from them; others again were born with authority and didn't have to think about such matters. Frig Allt, massively bored by classrooms and housemasterly duties, kept himself going through his oddities.

On a bitter January day he would enter a classroom and order the windows to be thrown open. Often, he taught from outside one of these windows, wrapped in his voluminous gown, rasping out French *dictée* from a patch of grass. Once, when I admired a tie he was wearing he took it off and gave it to me. When I admired a small picture he possessed he gave it to me, too. He had been known to sit on the ledge of the mantelpiece in the masters' common room to see if anyone would notice. At Trinity he had discovered an ancient privilege that permitted scholars to play marbles on the dining-hall steps. He indulged himself at once.

On summer afternoons, in the company of a Yeats biographer, whose younger son was at the school, Frig Allt would watch cricket. The biographer had an interest in the game, he none at all. But the occasion provided an opportunity for conversation about the poet, and Allt was expert at closing his mind to what he did not wish to enter it: the flannelled figures might not have existed.

On the point of being expelled for a misdemeanor too heinous for caning, a boy called Trench and I approached him in his housemaster's sitting room, seeking his intervention on our behalf. He was lying on the floor at the foot of a bookcase, concerned—so he said—about the bookworms that were attacking his books.

"We wondered, sir, if you know what's going to happen to us," Trench began, and Frig Allt replied that it was a serious business when microbes got going on your bookshelves.

"It's just that it would be a help to know," Trench began again, but the only response he received was that people didn't believe bookworms existed. We went away.

That abstracted air and his ploys to keep boredom at bay made him what he was. At roll call he adopted, for certain names, a nasal, American drawl in order to ring the changes. He pointed out to a boy called Orr that the extra "R" in his name was unnecessary, that the name would be more interesting without it. Without it, he added, the boy himself might in time become more interesting, and suggested that it was certainly worth experimenting in that direction. He would watch a hole forming in the floorboards of his room when coals fell out of the fire, forgetting that when this happens you are meant to do something about it.

The tedium of communal life drove him away from the school and into another, where he hoped his duties would be fewer. They weren't, and he managed only a few years there before he left schoolmastering altogether. Driven by his scholarship, he had a way, as he once said himself, of passing on.

He did so for the last time while still a young man, when his abstracted air got the better of him in London and he stepped out of the wrong side of a South Western electric train, his variorum unfinished. Hearing about the incident, it was easy to imagine, and still is: his pipe alight, he hums a tune as he prepares his stride for a platform that is not there.

His death accentuated what was not always self-evident: that there was nothing ersatz about his eccentricity. He died as he lived, somewhere else at the time. ♦

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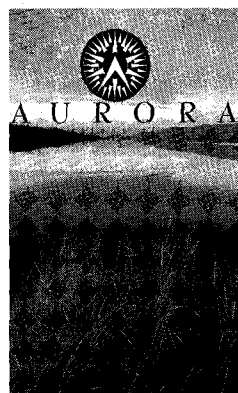


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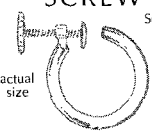
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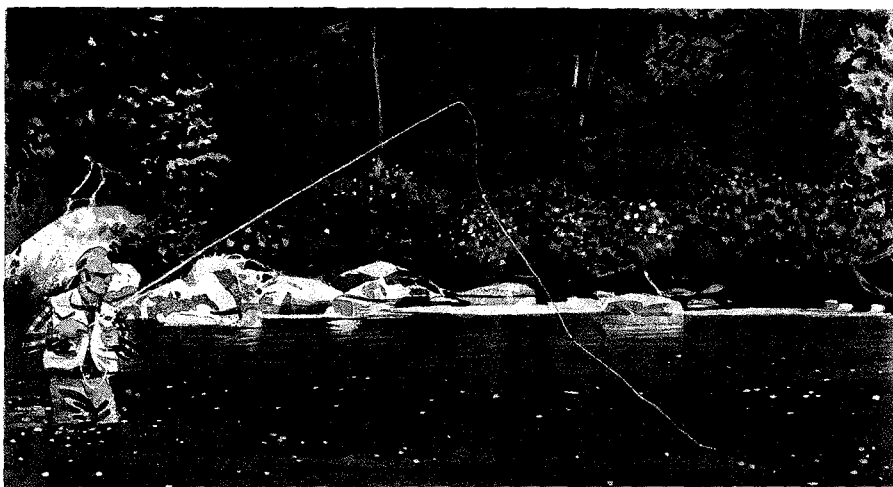
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THE SPORTING SCENE

ON THE AUSABLE

*Fishing a storied trout stream in the Adirondacks
through rain, rapids, and blackflies.*

BY IAN FRAZIER



ON the West Branch of the Ausable, an Adirondack river three hundred miles north of Manhattan, the stone looks the same as the stone downstate, only wilder. Big rocks of the kind that people sun themselves on in Central Park spill down the bed of the river, which sometimes pools around them and sometimes rushes by, white and fast; granite boulders the light gray or rose-pink of building fronts sit in midcurrent in skirts of eddies; smaller boulders on the stream edge make a chain of bathtub-size pools filled by small waterfalls. Looking into some larger pools from above, you can see sharp-edged blocks of granite lying toppled on the bottom. Tea-colored water pours steadily over lips as smooth as subway stairs. Cliffs of granite climb from the river in small terraces of pine and alder. Crotches between stream-side boulders collect bunches of driftwood, along with spiderwebs and pine straw and chunks of Styrofoam and wads of fishing line. The underwater rocks are so slick with gray-green algae that you have to grope along each one with your foot as you wade. Felt-soled boots are a must; wading staffs, too. The smooth granite of the big boulders, cool in the morning, warm on a sunny afternoon, does not give you much to grab on to when the current starts to

pull. In the fast sections, the sound of the main channels is so loud it overpowers the smaller noises of streamlets at the edge. Underneath the rushing is a deep, muffled grinding of the rocks in the bed. The sound is like a train passing under the street. I don't wade out in midcurrent unless I really need to. At a place miles from any town, I saw a boulder a ways out in the river with a strange marking. Slipping, sliding, turning sideways against the current, nearly falling, I waded to it. The mark was a borehole, a hole drilled for blasting at a quarry or a construction site. There is an old quarry near the river someplace far upstream. I climbed onto the boulder, noticed a likely place I couldn't have reached before, braced my knee in the borehole, cast. My dry fly, an Ausable Wulff, had less than a second to sit on some slack water before the current would snatch it. A rainbow trout shot to the surface, took the fly, dived.

In 1950, the angling writer Ray Bergman, in his book "Trout," described the West Branch of the Ausable:

A river rife with fishing legends, the home of numerous trout; a stream wildly fascinating, capable of giving you both a grand time and a miserable one; a stream possessing a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde temperament and a character strong enough to spread its fame from one corner of our country to the other. The Ausable commands your respect.

JULIAN ALLEN

It tests your skill and ingenuity. It is not a stream that will appeal to the timid, the weak, or the old. You like it best before you reach the age of forty. After that you wish you had youthful energy so that you could enjoy it as you did before the years of striving for existence had sapped your strength and made you a bit fearful of slippery rocks and powerful currents.

He does not mention the blackflies. When I stepped from my car late one morning in June, the sunny forest of conifers and hardwoods directed them at me like a ray. I got back in the car immediately and drove to Au Sable Forks and bought some Cutter insect repellent in a solid tube. At the elementary school there, it was recess; kids stood around on the playground twitching and swatting. I rolled the repellent over all exposed skin, stinging that morning's razor cuts. On the river, when I began to sweat—chest waders can be suffocating—drops flavored with repellent got into my mouth and made my lips tingle. The flies orbited me at several quantum levels, chewed my forearms through my shirtsleeve vents, made inroads under my collar, took long excursions between T-shirt and skin. I continued upstream, swatting and casting, slithering over rocks, splashing, stomping down brush. I didn't see a single fish. Nothing touched my dry fly, I got no strikes on my nymph. It began to rain lightly, then to pour. I decided to go back to the car. I left the river and climbed a steep cliff and got lost. I found an old logging road, followed it to a gravel road. By a hard-to-explain theory, I reasoned that if I just kept turning left at every intersection I would end up at the car. The theory turned out to be correct; however, the counterclockwise loop I described in the process covered perhaps five miles. I went up and down hills, on paved roads and unpaved. Rain fell so hard it made a loud noise on my hat. Even the money in my wallet got wet.

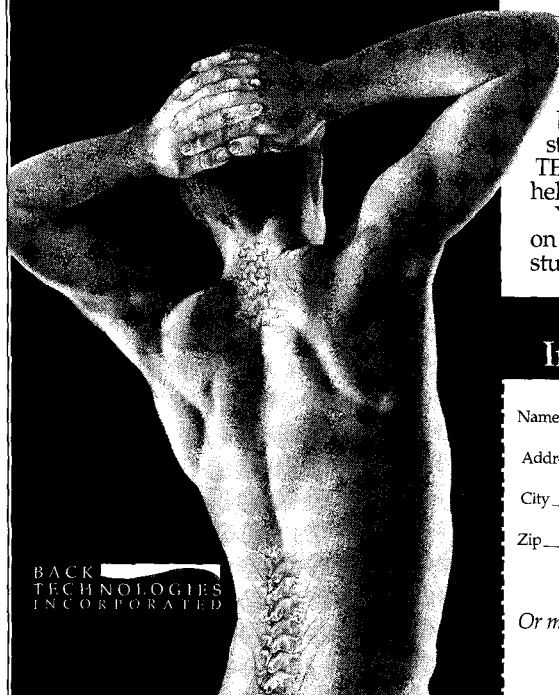
This particular trip, I was going nuts because I had not caught a fish in a while. In fact, I had fished two days on the river the month before without catching anything at all. People say, "Well, it's nice just to get out." But when you're not catching anything a heron flies by with wings creaking like a wooden pump handle, and a kingfisher ratchets over the water, and a beaver

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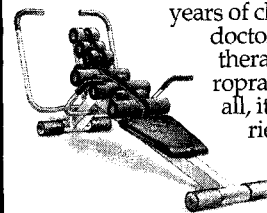
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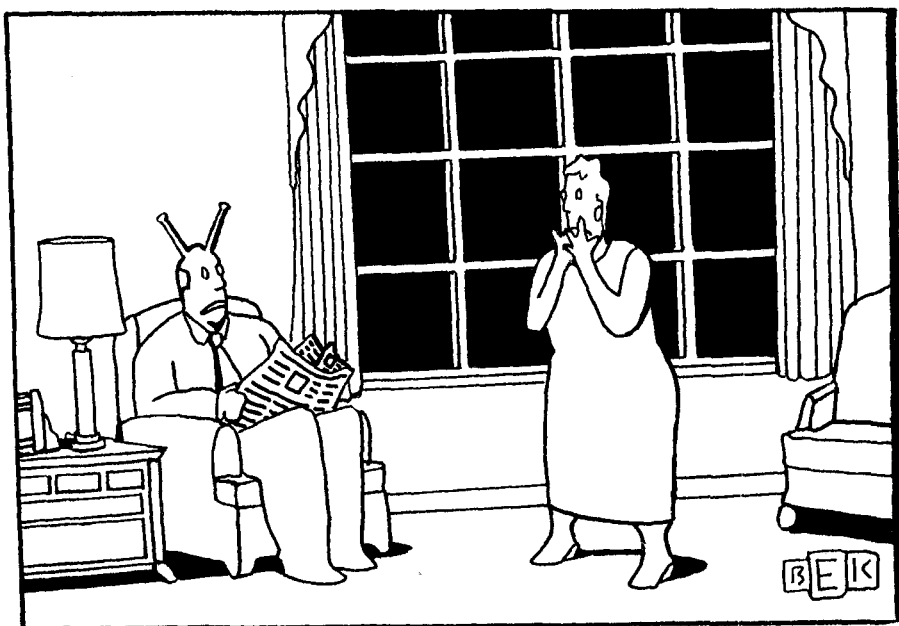
A D V E R T I S E M E N T

with its hair slicked back swims at you and spots you and pounds the water with its tail as it dives, and a robin flies back and forth across the river with something in its bill on each return trip, and a cedar waxwing stops so quickly in midair to snatch an insect that its feet skid forward in front of it, and a white gull flies along the river course and disappears around a bend, and two woodcock go up, one after the other, from a patch of alders, and bluets and violets and purple trilliums and swamp buttercups bloom along the bank, and it all seems vaguely to make fun of you. I'm not really there until I catch a fish. I reached the car, finally, and took off my stuff and drove, soaking wet, to another place on the river without stopping to eat.

THE West Branch of the Ausable contains lots of different kinds of water, from rapids to dammed-up narrow lake to waterfall flume to deep pool to slow, semi-marshy meadow stream. Actually, that's almost in reverse order. The river's upper reaches, near the town of Lake Placid, flow over mud-and-sand bottom through a level valley, sometimes past an expanse of potato fields. I had seen big fish rising on that upstream section the year before. It is thirty or more river miles from Au Sable Forks, about twenty by car. I parked behind several other cars at a one-lane bridge over the river. Fly fishermen were

standing in the water upstream and down. I walked a long way upstream and emerged from the brush and saw another fisherman. I continued until I couldn't see anyone. I was hoping to coincide with a hatch of the big mayfly called the green drake. In mid-June, the green drakes emerge from swimming and burrowing nymphs that have lived in the river for years, and as winged insects they float on the surface, make their way to shore, wait three days, mate in hovering flight in the air, lay eggs in the stream, and die. With some variation, all mayflies do this. In their mating-and-dying phase, they are called spinners. A big hatch or spinner fall of green drakes can make the river percolate with feeding trout.

As soon as I stepped into the river, a mayfly disengaged itself from the surface film and flew waveringly by me. I snatched it from the air, saw that it was a green drake, and ate it. Mayflies taste a little like grass stems, and have a similar crunch. Once, I was fishing the Sturgeon River, in Michigan, with my friend Don when drakes began to hatch, and the trout fed so eagerly, chasing insects five feet across the surface and coming clear out of the water and slapping logs with their tails and gulping and splashing, that we got hungry, too. We began to grab insects from the water and the air. They were like hors d'oeuvres, little winged shrimp. They left a bitter aftertaste and a dryness, but no



"I'll be straight with you. I was put on this planet to make your life miserable."

other ill effects, and they do fill you up.

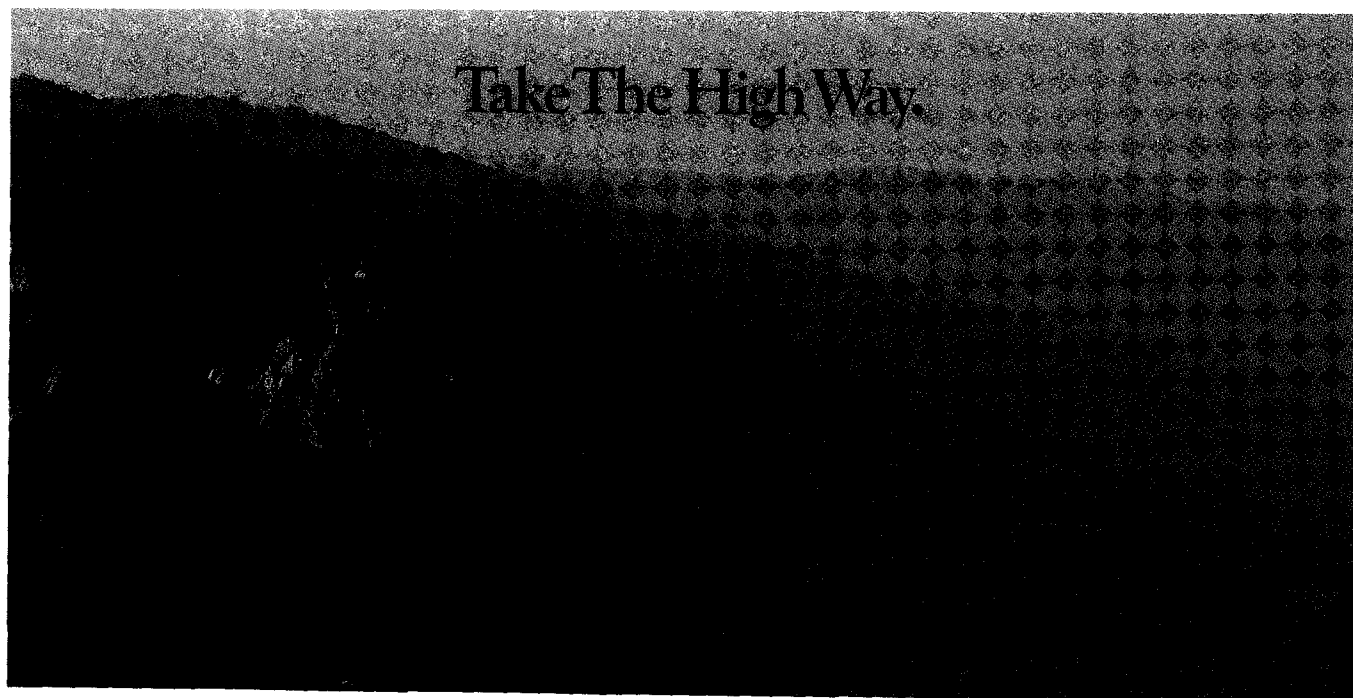
This time, I saw no drakes after that first one. The blackflies were as bad here as downstream. On my way, I had passed a man fishing in beekeepers' netting. I fished listlessly and hopelessly. Two guys came by spin-fishing from a canoe and politely dragged it through a shallow channel rather than disturb the deep channel where I was. They asked if I was having any luck (that's what you ask, I've found, in the East; out West, the query is "Doin' any good?"), and I said no, and they said they'd just started. Hours later, I still hadn't caught anything. At least, the wading here was easier than in the rapids. I ambled with the current, waist deep, half buoyant, bouncing along like someone walking on the moon. I got out and went through brush when I neared other fishermen. The river began to take on that sort of metallic color of a river with no fish in it. I kept casting out of nerve reflex and changing flies faithfully. The guys in the canoe paddled by again; they had been downstream and were now just cruising around. At my

question, the guy in the stern reached down, fumbled for a moment, and, with both hands, lifted one of the biggest rainbow trout I had ever seen. It was two feet long, its belly sagged, its silver sides had just begun to fade in patches of discoloration.

This revived my concentration wonderfully. I tied on a weighted fly meant to imitate a crayfish—I had noticed bleached shells of crayfish claws in mud along the bank—and flailed it all over the river. It was the size of a hood ornament and caused me to flinch and duck as it whistled past. I lost it on a birch log. I tied on another fly and kept flailing. Rain began to fall again, and lightning flashed. As I approached the pool under the one-lane bridge, the guy who was fishing there left. I moved up to and past where he had been. Close to the bridge I saw a fish hit the surface—the first rise I had seen all day. I tied on a White Wulff—a fly that resembles the green drake. I cast, watched the fly float among raindrop splashes. A fish rose, and I set the hook. I knew from the fight that this would be a decent-

sized fish. I maneuvered him alongside and scooped him up in my net.

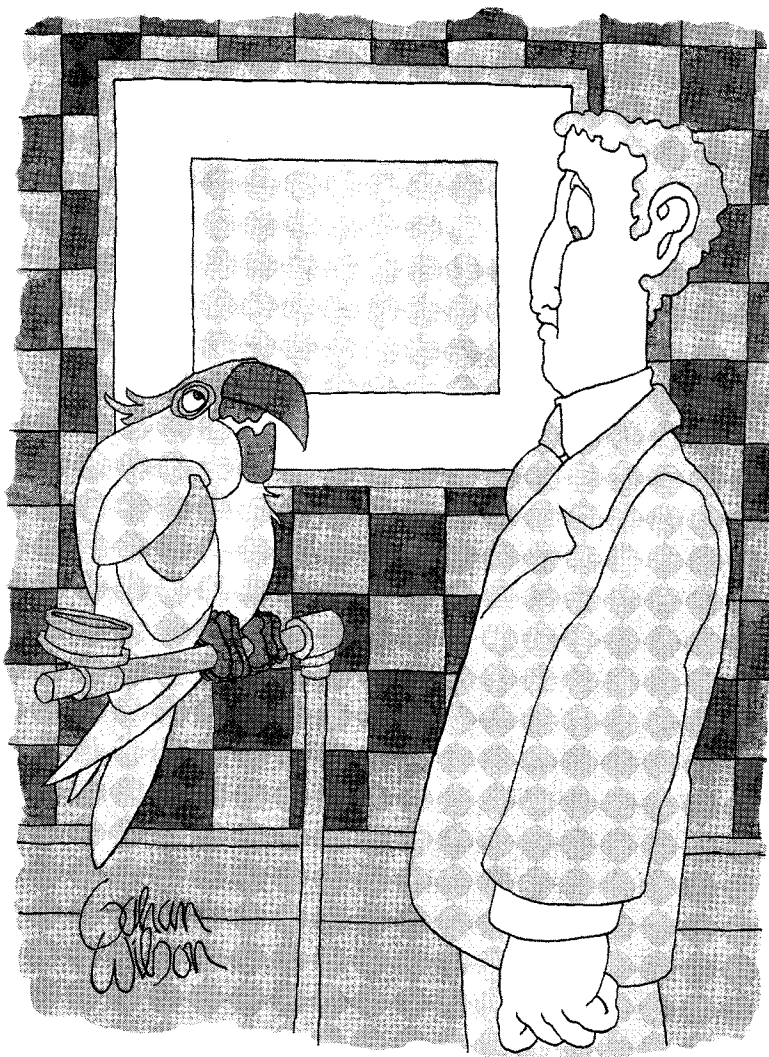
I am tempted to lie about how big he was, because it sort of embarrasses me to have been so pleased with a sleek, plump brown trout of no more than thirteen inches. But there it is: I felt fine. Calm, justified, highly skilled, even a little dangerous. I released the trout and stepped from the river into the Adirondack scenery, to which I now belonged. (My wife says she can tell just from the tone of my voice whether I have caught a fish or not.) I walked to my car. Up ahead, I saw the ski-jump towers used in the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympics. One tower is ninety metres high and the other is seventy. Lights to warn airplanes blink on top of the taller one. The rest of the structures were dark against the dim gray sky. John Brown, the abolitionist, is buried a few hundred yards on the other side of the towers. He had a farm here in the eighteen-fifties, when he helped to build a community of free blacks called Timbucto. A New York abolitionist gave the colonists the land, but



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V I R G I N I A



"Garbage in, garbage out!"

John Brown paid for his own farm. After he was hanged for the raid on Harpers Ferry, his wife brought him back here by train, boat, and wagon. Eleven of his sons and followers lie in the small cemetery with him. John Brown loved this place, and pointed out the beauty of the scenery to his children. The mountains—Whiteface, Marcy, and others—reminded him of the fortresses in the Alleghenies he had planned as refuges for the slaves he would free. He lies next to a cabin-size outcrop of granite in his former front yard.

ANOTHER morning, my wife and daughter dropped me off at the river near the ski jumps. They were going to Santa's Workshop, a little-kid amusement park in Wilmington, and would return in the evening. The day

was hot and still. Trout were rising all up and down the river, feeding on tiny mayflies called tricos (short for *Tricorythodes*, their genus name). These insects are the size of half a little-fingernail paring, or smaller, and the artificials that imitate them require tiny hooks with tiny eyes attached to wispy, hair-fine leaders. Working in such dimensions is right at the limit of my patience and dexterity. Many anglers ignore the trico hatches altogether. I found a fly that looked good in my box of tiny ones, and tied it to an 8X leader. Casting something so light and so hard to see is an activity bordering on mime. Finally, I put the fly more or less where I wanted it, and spotted it after it landed, thanks to its white wings. Fish rose all around it but ignored it. I switched to another fly—same result. I tied on tiny fly after tiny fly. The fish continued to

rise eagerly. My flies floated unscathed through rising fish like plucky couriers through bomb explosions in a war movie.

I worked my way far downstream and stopped at a gravel beach for lunch. A water snake zigzagged fast across the surface, in what looked like a shoe-lacing race. A hummingbird approached a honeysuckle bush in a series of right-angle lines, emerging from each blossom with a small, businesslike chirp. As often happens, I suddenly decided I should be fishing someplace far from where I was. I took off downstream, going overland through the brush so as not to disturb the water. There had been plenty of rain, and the bottomland was especially jungly. My too small waders caused me to walk penguin style—a style that inhibited leaps and vaults. I suffered several pratfalls. I thrashed through deep brush for forty minutes or more. At one point, a dead tree had fallen onto the dense willows and alders, providing a kind of elevated highway. I walked on the tree until a rotten part of it gave and dumped me into the understory. More plunging and thrashing. I emerged onto a red-muck section of riverbank and breathed deep and looked at my watch. It was gone.

The watch had been my father's, a gift from my mother inscribed with a motto and the date of their marriage. She gave it to me after he died. My mind swerved toward panic, imagining the sad-sack story I would tell my wife, and how sorry she and my sisters would be for me. I looked back at the brush I'd been in for half a mile. No way, man. Then I took off my waders—I had ripped out the crotch in the brush—and put my wading shoes back on. The watch must be somewhere. It was shiny metal. I had time before dark. Once I got back in the brush, it all looked the same, and I could not find where I'd been. I found boggy places with no footprints in them. I kept going, tacking back and forth. Off to the left, through the green gloom, I recognized the fallen tree I'd walked on. I climbed on it again, traced my path to the place I'd fallen. Suddenly, among the nondescript broken gray branches below, I saw the brown of the leather watchband, and there it was, there the watch was! I held it in my right hand and raised both fists in the air and sang. ♦



Fiona McDougall, NYT

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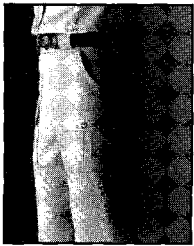
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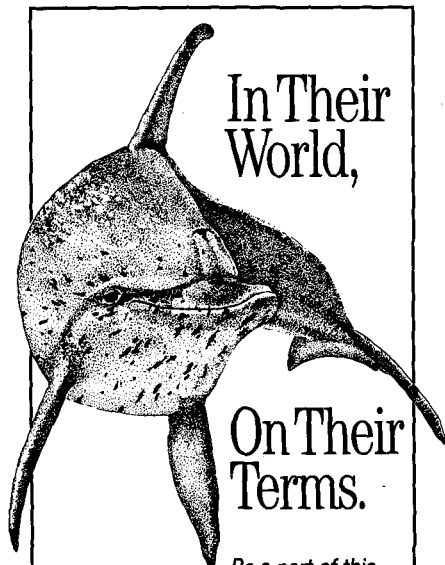
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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

BLOOD TEST

His hyper-violent vision made director John Woo a legend in Hong Kong and in American art houses—but now he's playing by Hollywood's rules.

BY JAMES WOLCOTT



Woo: Like Peckinpah, with a sense of black humor.

BLOOD does make a nice red," the movie critic Dwight Macdonald once noted. The bloody spectacles created by the Asian director John Woo are rhapsodies in red—wall-to-wall splatter art, fancy gushers. In most Hollywood action films, the weapons seem loaded with magic bullets that spare innocent bystanders and waste only the bad guys. In Woo's free-for-alls, innocence is no immunity; anyone caught in the field of fire is fair game. Set against the neon signs and corporate logos of Hong Kong, a visual clatter that Don DeLillo has identified as "the Esperanto of jet lag," Woo's cops and hoods (tough to tell them apart) shoot paths through mobs of hysterical, hand-flapping onlookers. A ward full of patients is perforated in "Hard-Boiled." A night-club singer is blinded by a gun blast in "The Killer."

The model for Woo's mayhem is Sam Peckinpah's multi-climax Western

"The Wild Bunch," where the robbers clutched little old ladies to their chests as human shields. Certainly the way Woo signs his characters' death certificates shows a Peckinpah flourish. Like Peckinpah's targets, Woo's take such powerful hits that their deaths become balletic spins, the blood spurting in slow motion from their bodies like lopsided bubbles. What makes Woo more than a Peckinpah impersonator is the goofy black humor he employs. In "The Killer," blinded lovers crawl right past each other. "Hard-Boiled," his homage to Peckinpah's "The Killer Elite," features an absurdly epic firefight in a hospital, with bodies launched from morgue trays like torpedoes, SWAT teams spidering the walls, and, to cap it all, Woo's hero—the smooth-moving Chow Yun-fat—quieting a squalling infant with an improvised rap song. He cradles the infant with one hand, keeping his gun hand free. "Hey! X-rated action!" he tells the kid as he blows an abdominal hole through his next victim.

The irresponsible, anarchic rush of Woo's power pulp—his sweeping camera, his razor cutting, his architectural destruction—has made him a legend among movie nuts who prize sensation over sensibility. Word would travel uptown in New York whenever a new Woo arrived in Chinatown. A writer I know said that when she saw "Hard-Boiled" during its recent run in Greenwich Village she was surrounded by young men who seemed to be collectively sighing with relief that they weren't stuck on a date at "Sleepless in Seattle." At last, a real guy movie. And when I caught Woo's first Chow Yun-fat hit, "A Better Tomorrow," each over-the-top burst of violence was greeted with the chant "Woo! Woo!" (Between the bursts they read the subtitles aloud to each other.)

Other directors have caught the bug. Woo's admirers include Quentin Tarantino ("Reservoir Dogs"), Abel Ferrara

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("Bad Lieutenant"), and Sam Raimi ("The Evil Dead"). With "The Killer" being released on laser disk (an American remake is also planned), "Hard-Boiled" a hit in art houses, and his first American film, "Hard Target," about to open, John Woo has become the most exciting cult-icon director from overseas since Sergio Leone put Clint Eastwood in a poncho.

So how does it feel to be the next big wave?

"I'm very discouraged," John Woo says over dinner in Los Angeles. "I'm very depressed."

Oh.

Born in 1946, in Canton, Woo moved to Hong Kong, with his family, at the age of four. He began fooling with cameras as a schoolboy, shooting little films of his own in 16mm. and Super 8. While still in his early twenties, he became a script supervisor at Hong Kong's Cathay Film Company, apprenticing under the martial-arts-film master Chang Cheh. On the soundstages, everybody was kung-fu fighting. After switching to Golden Harvest Studio, in 1973, Woo began directing his own features, coordinating the grunts and grimaces in such quickies as "The Young Dragons" and "Countdown in Kung Fu." He didn't emerge from the pack until "A Better Tomorrow," a lavish 1986 homicide spree starring Chow Yun-fat which inflated gangster rivalries into a species of holy war. The critical and financial success of "A Better Tomorrow," which spawned a pair of sequels and a slew of imitations, made Woo the top draw in the Asian action market. His movies became the region's most exciting export since Bruce Lee.

A man of slight build, usually dressed in a white shirt and light slacks, he doesn't loom against the horizon as a Leader of Men and a law unto himself, like so many veteran directors. (Peckinpah seemed to bring his own clouds.) There's a notable lack of ego muscle in his speech and manner. He doesn't strike you as the sort of genius-at-work who is intent on making those around him bend. Indeed, Woo, who has moved to Los Angeles with his wife and three children—in part as a protest against the 1997 reversion of Hong Kong to the Chinese (he's a staunch anti-Communist)—can't smoke in his own house. He's forced to smoke in the

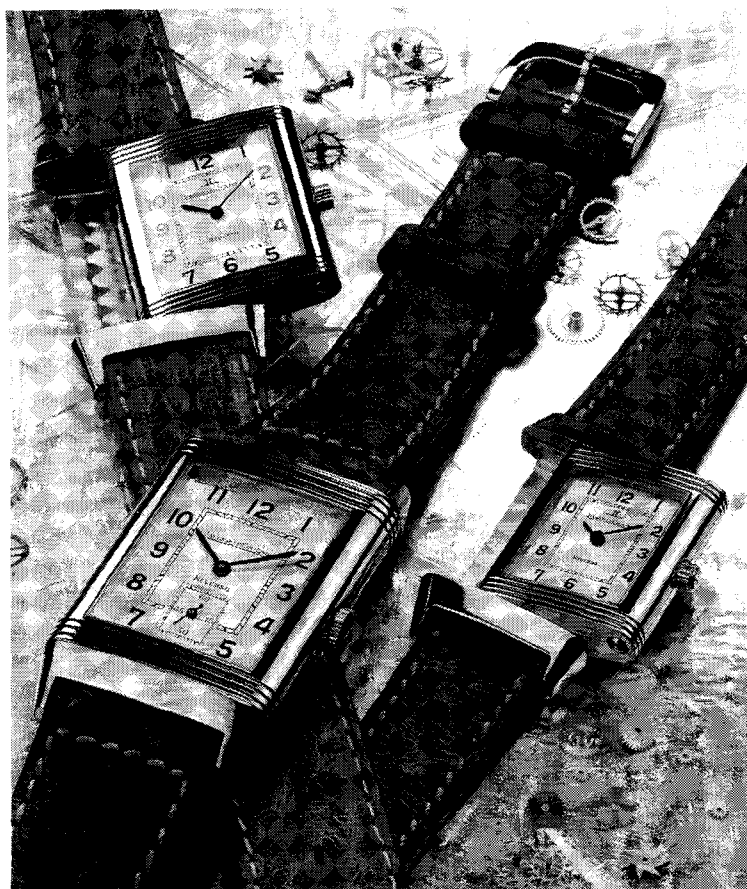


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back yard. "My children used to put little notes in my cigarette packs—'Please don't smoke, Daddy,' and 'We want you with us a long time.'" When we dine at Joss, a Chinese restaurant on Sunset Boulevard, where Woo is greeted with bows, the Marlboros remain in his pocket until the end of the meal. It's July, the month before the ordinance that bans smoking in all Los Angeles restaurants goes into effect, but he isn't taking any chances—a curious caution for the king of overkill.

With Woo is his assistant and interpreter, Jule Gilfillan, a U.S.C. film-school graduate, whose short "My Glorious Paradise" recently played New York's Asian-American festival. Woo speaks English with initial pauses, becoming more at ease after the first few sentences. He consults with Gilfillan only when a particular phrase has him stumped. The soothing atmosphere of the restaurant fosters civilized chat. It's not the kind of raucous joint that Chow Yun-fat would shoot his way out of, or into, blowing busboys through the swinging doors. Again, Woo says, without self-pity, as a simple fact, "I'm depressed."

The source of his heartburn is the sour time the ratings board has given him over "Hard Target"—a hunt for human game starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, Yancy Butler, Lance Henriksen, and Mr. Warm Oatmeal himself, Wilford Brimley, who steals the show bouncing on a horse. Boy, can he bounce! The board keeps branding "Hard Target" (it's slated to open this week) with an NC-17 rating—the kiss of death for a major studio release. Universal Pictures didn't sign Van Damme to a three-picture deal to have him playing at the art houses at midnight. (There have also been rumors that Van Damme himself leaned on the film in order to get maximum audience attention.) For Woo, the frustration with the ratings board comes from his not being able to pinpoint what needs to be fixed to secure the necessary R. "In Hong Kong, I can do what I want. If there is a problem with government censors, they will tell me, 'We don't like this, this is too much,' and I can work with that. But here it's not specific. I'm not cutting entire scenes, just frames from scenes. But I have to guess at what they want toned down." With each set of excisions (it

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

took seven tries before "Hard Target" earned an R), the film's rhythms have developed more of a twitch.

The audience testing of the film also took him down a peg. In Hong Kong, his films were never subjected to this kind of polling. According to one source, the early edits of "Hard Target" reflected the American movies of the seventies on which Woo cut his chops—the dazzling tours de force of directors such as Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, Francis Ford Coppola, and Walter Hill. What Woo discovered, to his dismay, was that audiences have dumbed down since then. Despite their steady diet of rock-video collages, the members of the MTV generation are baffled by flashbacks, parallel construction, split-screen images. If a story doesn't follow a straight line, it draws a big "Huh?" from Beavis and Butt-Head. So some of Woo's fancier tropes had to be snipped, along with the gorier bits. Although much of what remains is fairly gross. The movie bogs down whenever a fat sleaze who promotes a New Orleans phone-sex line is subjected to verbal harassment and torture. Such one-sided beatings—pummellings of people who can't protect themselves—have always been a major weakness in Woo's work, turning the camera itself into a bully.

Despite this blind spot, Woo recognizes that the national mood has curdled on screen violence. With TV chiefs volunteering to label violent programming, a conference on TV violence being shown live on CNN, and movie critics such as Michael Medved taking a paternal tack, he acknowledges that in the future he may have to dole out the ketchup in dribs and drabs. He set a water glass in front of Jule Gilfillan. "For example, if I was going to shoot someone sitting where Jule is sitting, I would want to show the bullet shattering the glass before it hits the body—all in a straight line. But now I might have to have a closeup of the glass shattering, then cut to the body slumped in the chair." Gilfillan obligingly snapped her head back as if she'd been shot. For a wild card like Woo, used to going "balls out" (to use Gilfillan's phrase), being forced to muffle his approach closes him off from his crazier impulses.

Which show themselves not only onscreen but on the set. For a quiet, unassuming sort, Woo entertains quite an

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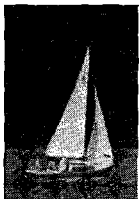
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"I am not waffling, I'm hedging. Big difference."

imp of the perverse. While making "Hard-Boiled," he was bothered by the lag time of the explosions at Chow Yun-fat's back as the actor hustled through the hospital with a fake infant tucked under his arm like a football. When the assistant director balked at rushing the explosions, not wishing to shorten the margin for error, Woo insisted on detonating the charges himself. Study "Hard-Boiled" closely, and you'll catch a flinch of surprise on Yun-fat's face as a fireball nearly blows him into the next continuum. Yun-fat managed to emerge mostly unscathed. "His hair just burn a little," Woo says. If he sounds blithe about the incident now (especially given

the fact that stuntmen and actors have died in movie-set accidents), it's not because he's callous. From his tone, it's clear that he values Yun-fat as an actor and as a friend. But Woo has a particular fury in getting the shot right, no matter what—to the point where it may warp his judgment.

Woo pushes himself as hard as he does the rest of the unit. On one film, he was frustrated by an actor's reluctance to pound his head into a meatloaf-shaped slab of earth. "I'll injure myself," the actor complained. "I told him, I'll show you how simple it is," Woo recalls. "And I slammed my head into the slab. About twenty times. 'See? I feel

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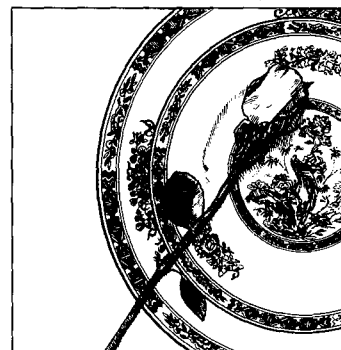
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nothing!' The rest of the crew began to shame him. 'Look at what you're making our director do!' Later, I began to feel faint. It really hurt." An even better piece of psychodrama took place during the making of Woo's Vietnam nightmare "Bullet in the Head," which is his hardest-to-watch movie. (Even the thrill-crazed *Film Threat Video Guide* admits that it's not for the squeamish.) A scene in which the stars had to witness an execution was heightened when, unbeknownst to the cast, Woo himself dressed in an enemy uniform and then had a clip of blank rounds fired into his back—forcing his actors to watch him die. He wanted to photograph the naked immediacy of their emotions. "They cried, because they realized how much they cared for me, how much we had been through together. The whole crew cried."

Filming "Hard Target" on location in Louisiana, Woo was an unknown quantity to his American crew. Because of his spotty English, he had to mime for the actors how he wanted them to contort themselves. "You would see him jumping up and down," says Yancy Butler, a wry, raspy-voiced brunette who recently honored a succession of bathing suits in the TV series "South Beach." "With the actors, he's open and generous, surprisingly gentle, but most of his concentration is on the camera. He choreographs its movements every step." Like Peckinpah, he often used multiple camera setups for action sequences, filming at different angles and speeds to create a prismatic effect. Since Woo was the only person on the set who carried the entire movie in his head—only he knew how this complicated footage would cut—he had to be on call the entire time. Actors, wardrobe personnel, technicians, paperboys leaning on their bikes—they all have questions they need answered. As the writer-director Robert Towne has said, the downside of directing is that you can't go to the bathroom without being pestered. Woo didn't even make it that far. "I wet myself during the making of the movie," he says. "We were shooting a scene outside a restaurant, and I was so wrapped up in it that I couldn't get to the bathroom, and peed myself. Later, I tried to use this with the producers in order to buy more time. 'I need four days to get this scene right! I'm

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trying to do too much! I work so hard I peed myself!"

Such tunnel vision is part of Woo's exemplary appeal. Enthusiasts may applaud him for testing the tugs-of-war between loyalty and authority, freedom and duty, individual and group. (His heroes suffer from psychological rope-burn.) And his monumental set pieces—lightning raids on homes, office buildings, parking garages, and marinas, in which swarms of extras are levelled, leaving only two men with barrels planted on each other's temples—can be read as comic-book pictographs of the nihilism of the near-future. "Hard Target," for example, has a phenomenal opening chase through a night so black and spectral it seems to belong to another planet. The entire movie intensifies one's sense of physical risk. But his themes, his subjects, his stylistic coups are secondary. The true message of John Woo is: Nothing matters more than making movies. Once you're in the zone, outside life can't compare. The process itself is worth any price, even the indignity of peeing yourself in public. (Not to mention the added indignity of my going on and on about it.)

In a period when the later works of Steven Spielberg, Coppola, Scorsese, and De Palma screen like skillfully executed designs, Woo seems the last of the real obsessives. Collaborative as movies are, they can still summon a lone sense of mission. It's instructive that one of Woo's favorite Peckinpahs is that permanent hangover "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia," a schlep through the sullen soul of Mexico that left green mold growing on the lens. And that the most animated he became during our dinner was when I mentioned Don Siegel's unsung Second World War study "Hell Is for Heroes," starring a very moody Steve McQueen. Both films are loose, flamboyant gestures of futility: death wishes. They represent the dark at the end of the tunnel.

Dinner ends. The table is cleared. At dusk, we drive up Sunset Boulevard, toward a monster-size poster of a black child pointing a gun at the streets below. The image is huge and imposing. (A similar billboard bears down on East Twenty-third Street here.) "It's supposed to be an anti-violence message," I say, to which Jule Gilfillan adds, "Yeah—'Stop John Woo movies.'" Woo laughs, the loudest he's laughed all night. ♦

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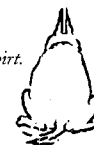
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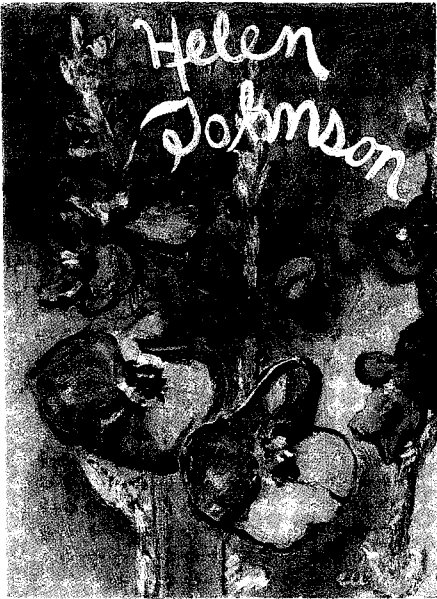
IN THE GARDEN

THIS OTHER EDEN

Why are the English such impassioned gardeners? Clues are planted in the landscapes of Charles Hamilton and Gertrude Jekyll, and at the Chelsea Flower Show.

BY JAMAICA KINCAID

THERE was a moment while I was inside a tent at this year's Chelsea Flower Show—a vast four-day-long display on the grounds of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, put on by the Royal Horticultural Society every summer—when I experienced a feeling that I imagine the great plant appropriators (David Douglas, Archibald Menzies, Asa Gray, Thomas Nuttall, John Torrey, Joseph Banks, Ernest Wilson) must have experienced upon first seeing a flower of special appeal: I wanted immediately to put the thing I was seeing in my handbag and take it home. I was looking at a *Verbascum* Helen Johnson—a kind of mullein I had never seen before. It was a sport found growing at the Royal Botanic



Gardens, at Kew. Helen Johnson is the name of the gardener who found the mullein. Its leaves were just like those of the ordinary wild mullein near my home, which I have been cultivating, but its flower was a brownish-apricot, almost translucent, with a yellow-and-violet twirl of stamen in the center. Perhaps its appeal for me lay in my not having seen it anywhere before, but I really felt I had to have it. It cannot be propagated by seed, because its seeds are sterile; it can be propagated only through cuttings. I learned this from the plantsman Adrian Bloom, of Blooms of Bressingham. While I was speaking to him about this plant, I saw him begin to put some distance—not exactly physical—between us. Familiar as he must be with the fanaticism of people who are involved with plants, my enthusiasm was

too much for him; he appeared not to know what it might mean. And neither did I. For days after I first saw the Helen Johnson—I saw it on the opening day of the Chelsea Flower Show—I tramped around the great gardens of England plotting ways to smuggle it back to this country. One day, when I was reading the newspaper I came across an article about the woes of honey farmers in England. Entire hives have had to be destroyed because they have become infected with bee mite, a parasite that attacks baby bees while they are still in the cell and causes them to be born deformed. It is believed that the bee mite came to England when some beekeepers took their hives on a boat to France so the bees could gather lavender pollen there—that while the bees were gathering lavender pollen they picked up the mites, and when they returned to England the mites came with them. I have never, as far as I know, tasted lavender honey, but I wonder if, once it is tasted, it must be tasted again and again, no matter what the cost.

I was wandering through the Chelsea Flower Show—inside the Great Marquee, where the flowers were on display—amid a whirl of things forced into perfect bloom, more perfect than anything nature would allow. If I had not known that the Chelsea Flower Show dates back to 1913, I would have thought that this event had never happened before, that this was the first time it had ever been put on. Being there was like being at a child's birthday party. I was in a daze, because I had just



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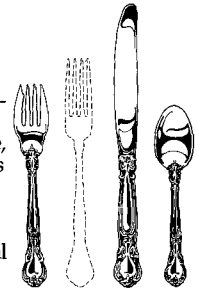
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got off an airplane (it was the middle of the morning, and my body wanted it to be the middle of the night); I was in a daze because I was in the midst of so many exquisite flowers, and because I was in the midst of people who were so pleasant and kind. It was hard to believe these people were related to the people who were so rude and insulting to me as I passed through customs. If you ever want to hold a grudge against someone, don't see that person alongside beautiful flowers. I loved all the people I saw at the Chelsea Flower Show, standing among rhododendrons in impossible shades of mauve, pink, and peach. They came streaming in through an entrance called the Bull-Ring Gate, off the Chelsea Embankment (the same one I had come through), from all directions, as far as I could see, and they looked not like twentieth-century citizens but like residents of a village—a village far from the city, far even from a town. They displayed the orderliness of the unsophisticated: they lined up; they were polite; they were not nervous; they didn't seem to be expecting (as I was) a terrorist disaster.

The stand of sweet peas was spectacular: none of the Mammoth Mixed or Old Spice, the meanly flowering varieties common to my garden, but large, generous flowers of the clearest, purest single colors—pure pink, pure white, pure mauve, pure red, with names that seem to have sprung from a mind exhausted with the effort of naming things

(Band-Aid, Royal Wedding). Just after the sweet peas, I came to the place where Peter Beales' roses were being displayed, and a group of people, all twittering and pleasantly agitated, were standing about in the midst of roses that looked even better than the ones in the Wayside Gardens catalogue. Apparently, a duchess had been there; she had unveiled a new rose to the public, and then she had left. When I got there, people were still basking in an "I saw the Duchess" atmosphere. At that moment, I realized that I had been missing my children, who had stayed home in Vermont with their father. My children like to dress up in some old thrift-shop clothes that used to be mine, clothes that are from the Victorian era, and they pretend that a duchess is coming to tea: she comes, they have tea with her, they quarrel with her, she chops off their heads. This game ends in huge peals of laughter. But my children will grow up and they will stop playing duchess, and go on to live, happily or unhappily, the messy lives of ordinary human beings.

The best display I saw all day was that of the Crown Estate, a selection of things grown in Windsor Great Park, which belongs to the Queen. The blue poppy was there (a flower nearly impossible to grow here, because of our hot, dry summers); so were some hosta (Sieboldiana). And there was something there, too, that I had never seen before, something called *Gunnera manicata*,

which had leaves so large they seemed as if they could cover ten children's bottoms; they were serrated and deeply cut, like castor-bean leaves. Its flower was about two feet tall, shaped like a pinecone, and emerged from under the leaves, an undelicate and green protuberance. This plant is from Brazil—a very nice young man, a gardener for the Crown Estate, told me so. I missed the unveiling of the Astilbe Catherine Deneuve (Blooms of Bressingham), which is a pink astilbe that looked like many other pink astilbes, but I saw the stoutest, tallest lupines I have ever seen. They were banked up against a wall—a sea of fat, erect whorls covered with red, yellow, and

orange pea-shaped blooms. And at the Hazeldene Nurseries stand there was a wonderful display of violas and pansies. Particularly lovely was a cream-colored viola with tiny gray lines running through it, called Viola Cream Lady. As I was walking out of the Great Marquee, I recognized Rosie Atkins, the editor of a beautiful new English magazine called *Gardens Illustrated* (I recognized her because there is a photograph of her on the editor's page), and, I suppose, hungry for someone to talk to, I said hello to her and told her how much I liked her magazine (and that is true, I do like it), but I did not tell her that we in America do not have as good a magazine about gardening as hers.

Outside the tent were gardening tools and garden furniture and the show gardens. In a garden called Wildflower and Seaside Garden (it won the Fiskars Sword of Excellence for best garden at Chelsea this year), burdock was featured prominently, and then and there I began to look forward to the day when I might see a kind of burdock growing in a garden in England and be so filled with longing for it that I would consider, again, breaking the law. And in another show garden I saw the rose Rambling Rector in full bloom, and it made me wish that Peter Beales lived in America, because he sells *real* roses, including this rambler—the kind that would actually survive in the climate I occupy (which, to me, is a real climate). Also,

his book about roses is very good, so full of help.

It was by now a beautiful afternoon, and I would have plowed on, but I saw something that made me feel like going back to my hotel for a rest. To commemorate the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Gertrude Jekyll's birth, the magazine *Country Living* sponsored a garden filled with flowers she liked, and growing more or less in a scheme that the people at the magazine believed she would have approved of. And that was fine, except that they had hired an actress to portray Jekyll, and this woman—wearing Edwardian clothing—made Jekyll look feeble and stingy, and as if she had just been removed from a time capsule: damp, full of mildew, not at all like the great artist she was, the great eccentric who always managed, somehow, to deflect close scrutiny. A few days later, in Godalming, Surrey, when I visited Munstead Wood, the house she had Sir Edwin Lutyens build for her, and I was standing in her bedroom, I realized anew how false that brittle portrayal of her was. Everything about the house, with its big rooms, its wide hallway, the specially chosen light wood used for stairs and beams, the wonderful views of woodland and rhododendrons and azaleas and walks and flower beds to be seen from the windows, had the texture of sensuality and passion and generosity.

The following morning, before returning to Chelsea, I was reading the newspaper, and, after turning away from the extremely unsympathetic opinions of a man with a name (Peregrine Worsthorne) that sounded like an old-fashioned purgative given to children, made from a herb now cultivated only in a physic garden, I came upon an article about a woman who holds the National Collection of Pelargoniums. She was upset because most people (and until very recently I was one of them) do not know that pelargoniums and geraniums are not the same thing—or, to put it coarsely, that geraniums are the ones you can leave outside, while pelargoniums are the ones that must be brought inside, the ones with scented leaves, the ones in window boxes, the ones that turn black when the first frost hits them. She said that before the war people didn't call a pelargonium a geranium, but then the gardeners went away to war, and the distinction was lost. This, of course, dominated my experience for

the rest of the day: If when the gardeners went away the world of plant differentiation fell apart, what else might have fallen apart? And what did she really mean to say, this woman? If only the world—especially the gardeners—had stayed put? And then I missed my children less, because they always think it's my fault when things don't work out. But there is a big difference between a mother and a gardener.

That day at the flower show, I saw another beautiful grouping of Helen Johnson, at a stand run by Hopleys Plants, and I later read in the catalogue that the nursery had been the first to introduce the flower, in 1991. (Barbara Barker, who runs Hopleys, with her husband, was a very kind person. She encouraged my enthusiasm, and it was her soothing voice I heard when I read in the catalogue, "We should like to thank all those people who have kindly given us plant material over the years. Do you perhaps have a plant you think we should grow—we would be pleased to swap.") This was another lovely day spent among gardeners—gardeners, I kept thinking, who had replaced those who had willy-nilly gone off to war.

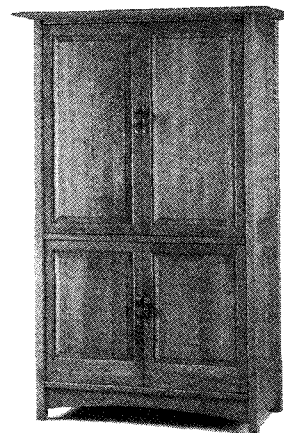
IT has become almost impossible for me to think of the two things I like most, history and gardening/botany, without thinking of Thomas Jefferson, and when I was in England I wanted to see a garden he had visited. Painshill Park was one of the places he and John Adams saw on a trip they took together in 1786, while they were negotiating a trade treaty with Portugal. This I learned from Eleanor McPeck, who is a garden historian and teaches landscape design at Radcliffe. She had said that, of all the gardens Jefferson saw in England, he liked Painshill Park, in Cobham, Surrey, best. (One of the nice things about hearing her talk about Thomas Jefferson is the way she will say "Jefferson did this" and "Jefferson was"—this use of his name not implying a phony intimacy but acknowledging that she and he are two citizens on the same public footing.) I am sure it's true that Jefferson loved Painshill, but it is hard to tell this from his own writing. A transcription from his journals reads:

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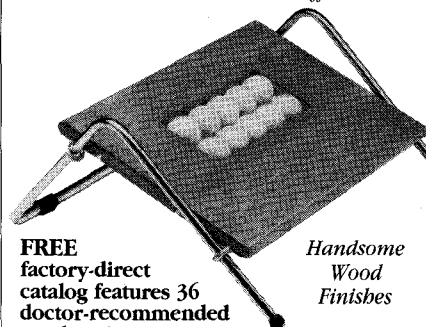
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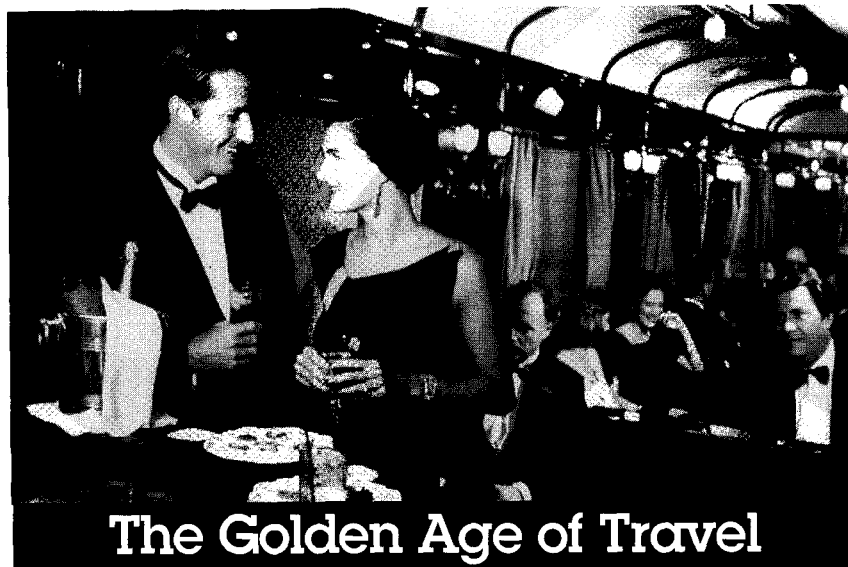


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the end of Jekyll's old nut walk. She has been criticized for doing this—but why should she have to live in the Gertrude Jekyll House museum?

There actually is such a thing, a Museum of Garden History, in London. It is in an old church in Lambeth, and in the churchyard there the Tradescants (of *Tradescantia*, or spiderwort), John the Elder and John the Younger, are buried. The Elder was the first real personality gardener in England, and the Younger had been to Virginia for the purpose of bringing plants back to England with him. It was their tomb that I wanted to see, not for any particular reason—just curiosity—but their tomb led me to some other things that are of interest to me. The Tradescants, father and son, are buried together, and the tomb next to theirs holds Captain William Bligh, his wife, his twin sons, and a grandson. There was a small knot garden of dwarf box in the middle of the churchyard, and it is the only knot garden I have ever seen that did not make me feel despair. Inside, in the bookshop, I found a biography of the Tradescants in which the author (Prudence Leith-Ross) quotes Francis Bacon as saying, "Nothing is more pleasant to the eye than green grass kept finely shorn," and I could only think that this was someone who never had to cut the grass himself. The exhibition in the museum was about Gertrude Jekyll, again having to do with how long ago she was born. It had everything you would expect—her tools, letters, photographs of her family, and so on—but only two things really interested me. One was a copy of her brother Walter's book of songs, which he wrote in tribute to the people of Jamaica. He did not like black people, so, naturally, he had to go and live among them. For some people, a fixed state of irritation is oxygen. I understand this all too well. The other thing was Gertrude Jekyll's gardening boots. Anyone who has bought those stupid, uncomfortable clogs or the rubber boots that are advertised in garden catalogues should see these: strong, sensible, comfortable-seeming leather boots, which were studded on the bottom with iron to make them last. They looked like a well-loved home.

When I got home myself, I found my pansies committing suicide; they were in desperate need of deadheading. I watched with equal parts of joy and sadness the longest day of the year come and go. ♦



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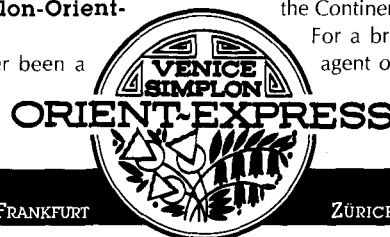
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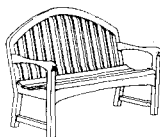
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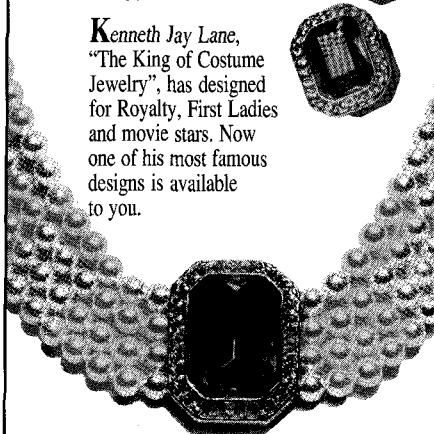
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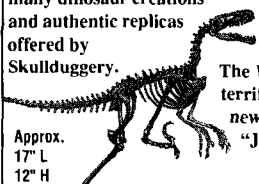
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LIFE IN THE CITY

SURVIVAL IN THE NIGHT

A former policeman comes to terms with a terrifying intrusion into his own home.

BY JONATHAN RUBINSTEIN

ON a Saturday morning recently, I joined a couple of friends who are volunteers in the Bronx-Harlem Needle Exchange Program, now sponsored by New York Harm Reduction Educators, Inc., which attempts to provide New York's very large drug-injecting population with consistent access to sterile needles and syringes, in order to reduce the spread of H.I.V. At Burnside and Jerome Avenues, in the Bronx, the El provided us some shelter from a cold pelting rain, but the crowd of users and dealers in front of the methadone clinic down the block was evidence that getting high is more important to some than staying alive. Or, at least, equally important: by noon, the large plastic-lined jug into which clients dropped their used needles, one at a time, was almost full. Some clients exchanged one needle; a few had more than fifty. They were mostly middle-aged; they included a few married couples; and there was one father-and-daughter duo. All in all, a group representative, it might seem, of that American hybrid the junkie. But the injectors who use the needle-exchange program may not be a representative sample of the city's drug-injecting population. They are a self-selected elite, a tiny fraction of New York's addicts. Some of the others have switched to crack, and, because the fear of AIDS is great, smoking and snorting heroin are now popular. The addicts who exchange needles are veterans—those who have managed, somehow, to shoot up and survive.

When I served with the Philadelphia Police Department for a few years in the early seventies, I often encountered drug addicts in far less amiable settings. But

here at the Needle Exchange, there is a strong rapport between many of the clients and the volunteers who have been working on this bleak corner, winter and summer, for over three years, under the threat of arrest until July of last year, when the state legalized the program. Some addicts just exchange a few needles, fill their pockets with cotton swabs, alcohol pads, cookers, and bottles of bleach and water, and hurry away to shoot up. But more of them hang around to gossip, exchange information

about drugs, see who does and does not show up. They talk to you. As I handed out packages of condoms, chatting and joking, I realized that all morning I had been searching, not quite consciously, for a certain stranger—the last black stranger I had looked right in the eye.

This was four years ago, on the first night of Passover. Returning home from dinner around eleven, I roamed my loft, ignoring CNN, sipping water, bemused because I couldn't remember much of what my friend and I had discussed over our meal. Finally, I gave up thinking about what friendship is, and went to bed.

Propped up, listening to a blues program on WKCR, I was comfortably snug, tucked into a corner of the very large loft as I waited for sleep to overtake me. My reading lamp was the only light still on.

The door to the living room was almost open by the time I realized it was moving. Thinking my son had returned home from the Seder at his grandmother's, I stared, smiling, anticipating a greeting. Moments passed. Nothing. Then, emerging from the dark, a pair of eyes whose size still fills my entire mind,



a white shirt, and a silver gun pointing directly at me.

A few seconds went by before any words were spoken. I have relived those ticks many times and am reasonably sure I recall everything that went through my mind. I saw the length of lead pipe propped between the window and the bookcase and knew I could not get to it. My eyes moved from the gun to the man's eyes and back to the gun. It was dead level. Behind the now wide-open door was a filing cabinet that contained a loaded short-barrelled Smith & Wesson .38 Detective Special. Warning myself not to stare at the cabinet, I extinguished the fantasy.

I said what I still think was the only appropriate thing to say: "Holy shit." He stepped inside my bedroom and replied, "Do as you're told or I will kill you." There was no particular menace in his voice; people who claim to love me have spoken much more harshly. But the unwavering barrel of his .25 semi-automatic made it clear to me that this was not a new experience for him.

I lay propped up on several pillows, naked, covered by a cotton blanket, with whatever I was reading still in my hand. Was it a weapon? Our eyes were locked as he advanced a pace or two, but not far enough for me to kick upward at him.

"Roll over and put your face in the pillow."

Of course I thought about dying; of course I thought about being raped; of course I wanted to kill him. I did not move.

"Do as I tell you or I will kill you."

I said this to him: "I have a fifteen-year-old son who is not here, but he will be back soon. If you're here when he gets home, he will flip out, and I don't want you to shoot him. Take what you need and leave. Just ask. But I will tell you now, there are no drugs. You missed a great party, but it's been over for years."

"Roll over" was his reply. I did. I heard the cord ripped from the bedroom telephone. As I turned to look, he said, "I told you to keep your face in the pillow or I will kill you." From the sound of his voice, he could have been asking me to pass the butter.

The blanket was pulled away. I am sure I held my breath, because when he put his knee in the small of my back I felt the breath knocked out of me. I

knew this was the moment to act. He was close. He would have to put the gun down to tie my wrists—unless he had already made a loop. As he pressed forward on his knee, the distinctive, sour smell of ether filled my nose for the first time in years. A looped cord was tightened around my wrists, pulling my shoulders back. Then the pressure on my back was gone, the cord twisted loosely around my ankles. He had not put the gun down to hog-tie me properly.

"Where's your money?" he asked evenly. After I told him, I heard the doors to my study open. "That's all there is?" he asked, disappointed. I reminded him of my son, who was already late. "Tell me what you want. I want you gone," I said, twisting my head in the direction of his voice. I did not see him. Then suddenly I was covered with the blanket, the chill of having been uncovered replaced by an irrational sense that everything would be all right. I was determined to continue talking to him, to keep a connection with whatever emotion had prompted him to cover me.

I heard his deliberate footsteps echo as he began his tour. I heard a zipper being pulled. I knew it was my red gym bag. I thought of the dozen pairs of gray sweat socks I had bought earlier that day. The footsteps resumed. Please, don't stop, I prayed, knowing he was in the vicinity of my computers.

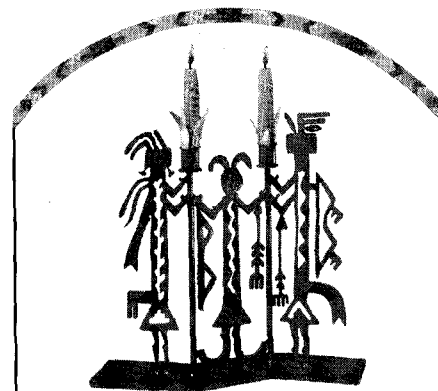
"You like to fish?" he asked. That morning I had stacked the rods in the corner, ready for stringing. He was almost at the front door. "I wish I was fishing now," I said.

He continued walking. The kitchen lights went on. From a distance, he said, "You got a nice house," without a trace of anger or envy in his voice. It was an honest appraisal from a man who had seen quite a few houses. "Thank you," I replied, reminding him once more about my son. His footsteps were getting louder.

"I'm going to leave now," he said, his statement punctuated by the sound of the zipper being closed.

"That's the nicest thing I've heard you say," I replied with complete sincerity. By this time I had shaken the cord from my ankles, but my bound wrists felt slimy. I heard the squeak of my front door opening and then closing.

I waited a second and then I was



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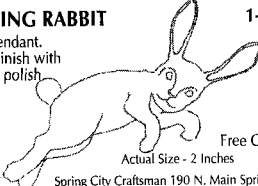
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standing, my only thought to get to the speakerphone on my desk. I was almost there when a beam of light was fixed on me. He was back. I froze, naked in the middle of the room. My wrists were bleeding.

"What's wrong with your elevator?" he asked—though without the irritation that I had heard from many visitors over the past months. I started laughing, seeing myself in a Peter Arno cartoon. "Listen, pal," I said. "You just have to walk down like the rest of us."

"Oh. O.K." The light disappeared. I stood rooted for an instant, then ran to my door, which was ajar. When I got there, I saw my gym bag and Sony portable tape deck vanishing through the landing doorway. I pushed the front door shut with my body. Then, with my back turned, standing on tiptoe, I managed to flip the dead bolt, and I ran to the telephone, thinking how slow he was. If I could get the cops to respond, there was a chance.

I punched 911 correctly on the second try. "I am an ex-cop," I said to the operator. "I just got robbed at gunpoint in my house. Get me some cops now and we got a chance to nail this guy." I gave her the address, told her what he took, and then described him as a cop would. "A black male, medium complexion, tall, slender, short hair, wearing a white shirt and dark pants." I said I would stay on the line until she told me cars were responding. She put me on hold. While I waited, the other line

rang. I cut my son off in midsentence as he began to explain why he was an hour late. The operator returned to say police were on their way.

I paced up and down, unable to do anything except pace up and down. It could not have been an hour since this night had become different from all other nights. The buzzer sounded. Working the intercom with my chin, I directed the cops to the fifth floor, un-snapped the bolt, and ran to the landing to meet them. Both men were breathing hard when they arrived. One cut me loose with a switchblade. "You a cop?" he asked.

"Ex," I said, running down the hall to get some clothes. "We can get this prick. He is really slow." I pulled on pants, a sweatshirt, and sneakers.

"Nice place," the other cop said as I rushed out the door, leaving it wide open.

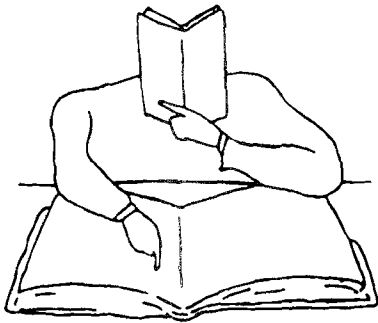
When we reached the street, the cop holding a radio said they had a suspect at the corner. I sprinted the thirty yards to Houston Street and found two officers were holding a short black man, who was protesting his innocence. I shook my head. "No," I said to their sergeant, who was looking on.

"The perp's a junkie," I told him. "He got eighty bucks and a radio. If I was him, I'd head for the Bowery. It's the closest place to score. Maybe we'll get lucky. Let's ride." I climbed into the front seat of the sergeant's car without waiting for an invitation.

Maybe twenty minutes had passed



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since the robber left my house for the second time. Plenty of time to disappear, of course. We drove a block, and it did not immediately register when I saw a tall, thin black man, a red gym bag dangling from his swinging arm, walking east at a leisurely pace on the south side of Houston Street. "There he is!" I yelled, opening the door of the still-moving car. The sergeant had already spotted him, and so had officers in several cars coming from the opposite direction. He was running by the time I was out of the car. Several cops, their guns drawn, were holding him in the middle of the intersection of Broadway and Houston when I arrived, with murder welling up in my heart.

A cop had him bent over the trunk of a car and was asking if he had any needles in his pockets. His hands were cuffed behind his back. I reminded them that he had a gun. They stood him up and removed the silver .25 from his waistband. The cop took one bullet from the chamber, and the clip held three more. I identified him, and they emptied his pockets and stuffed him into a police car. That was the last I saw of him.

Declining a ride to the station, I went home first to lock my door. My neighbors were clustered on the landings, talking, each asking me to repeat what they knew had happened. How did he get in? Seeing the look of horror in their faces, I felt fear for the first time. With each repetition, the events sounded more grotesque, more disconnected from my life. Did this really happen?

Shaken and angry, my son greeted me in the doorway. As I walked around the loft, describing to him what had happened, it seemed even more unreal. If I hadn't been home, I would not have noticed anything amiss until I looked for my gym bag in the morning. There was no lingering scent of evil—nothing to match the feelings that were growing in me. I locked the windows, speculated about how he had entered, and then went to the First Precinct.

The scene was familiar: 2 A.M., the cops credited with the arrest surrounded by colleagues congratulating them, everyone animated, rather than struggling to stay awake on some aimless patrol, hanging on until breakfast. Nailing an armed-robbery suspect meant a guaranteed commendation, maybe a day off. I recalled a freezing night eighteen years

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"Sexy, yes. But without sleaze."

earlier when my partner and I chased a suspect on an empty street in North Philadelphia's sprawling ghetto. The sense of exultation and success was what I recalled most clearly—except for the moment when I considered how cold the suspect's hands must feel as they clung to the chain-link fence I ordered him to grab, my gun levelled at his back, and watched my partner take from the man's pocket a loaded revolver and a L-noleum knife.

I left the cops to enjoy their moment of collegial triumph and sought their sergeant. The tape deck was gone. My red gym bag and cash would be held for evidence, and I could recover them after the suspect had pleaded. The sergeant was a good cop—but I resented his reasonable speculation about what had happened, since it diminished my role in catching the robber. This was an experienced criminal, he said, who understood how cops worked. Instead of fleeing immediately, he had concealed himself, figuring that in a few minutes the cops

would be busy elsewhere. Maybe he gave the tape deck to an accomplice or traded it on the street for crack. If he had not held on to the gym bag, he might have made it.

The detective who took my statement was sympathetic and thorough. He wrote everything down, and said other detectives would come to my house in the morning to look for fingerprints and other evidence. There had been many burglaries in my neighborhood, and he hoped to solve some of them. He asked me several times if I would testify before a grand jury, apparently not reassured by my promise. I tried to answer all his questions carefully, without comment or rancor.

I walked home, determined not to feel any fear of the street. I was not a victim. I had not acted like a victim, and the robber was in jail. I left the door to my living room open, seeing his eyes and gun as clearly as I do now. But I slept fine.

Daylight dissipated any mystery about

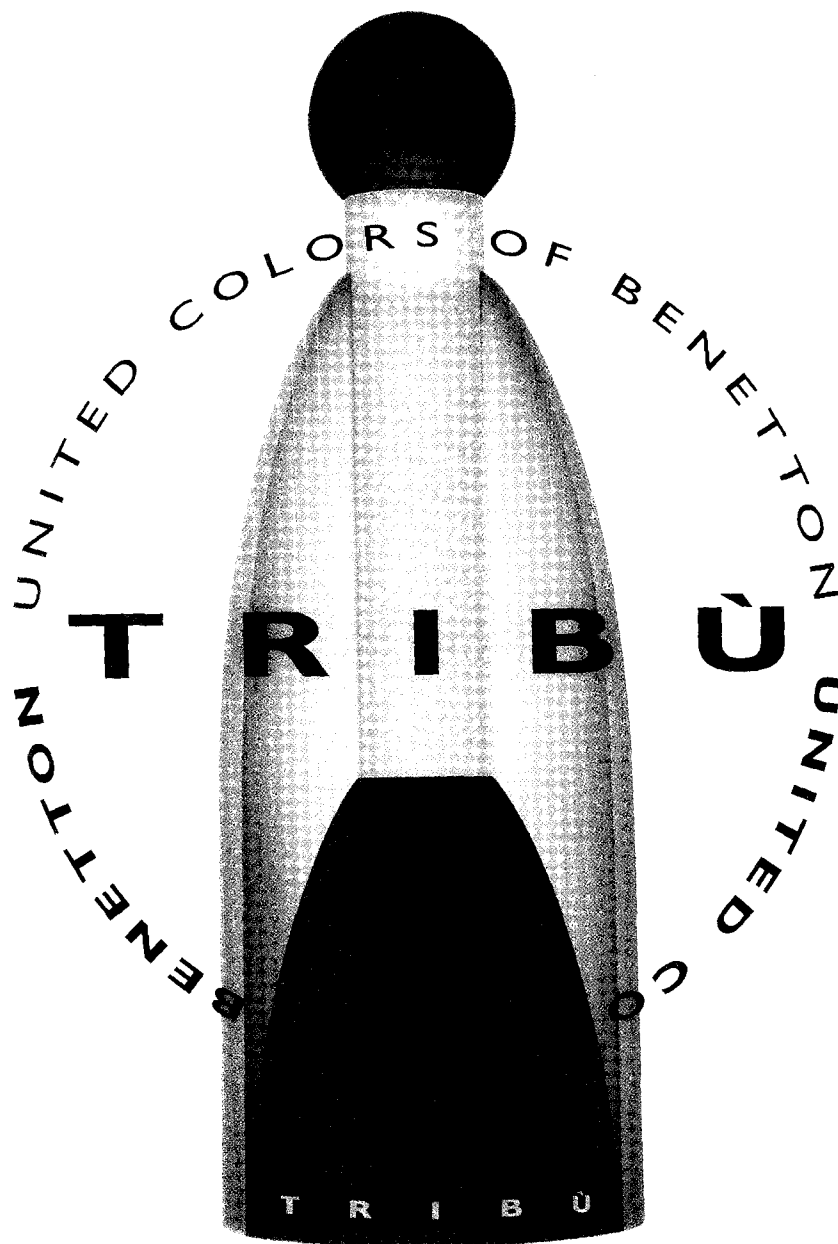
his entry. On the fire-escape landing lay a soiled Army-issue field jacket. In a pocket were two vials stained with white residue. Had he jumped from the rail to the window ledge? No. He had swung across on a rotting iron shutter, from the fire escape to the narrow stone ledge of one of the living-room windows, where he must have crouched while pushing up the window itself. The ground was fifty feet down.

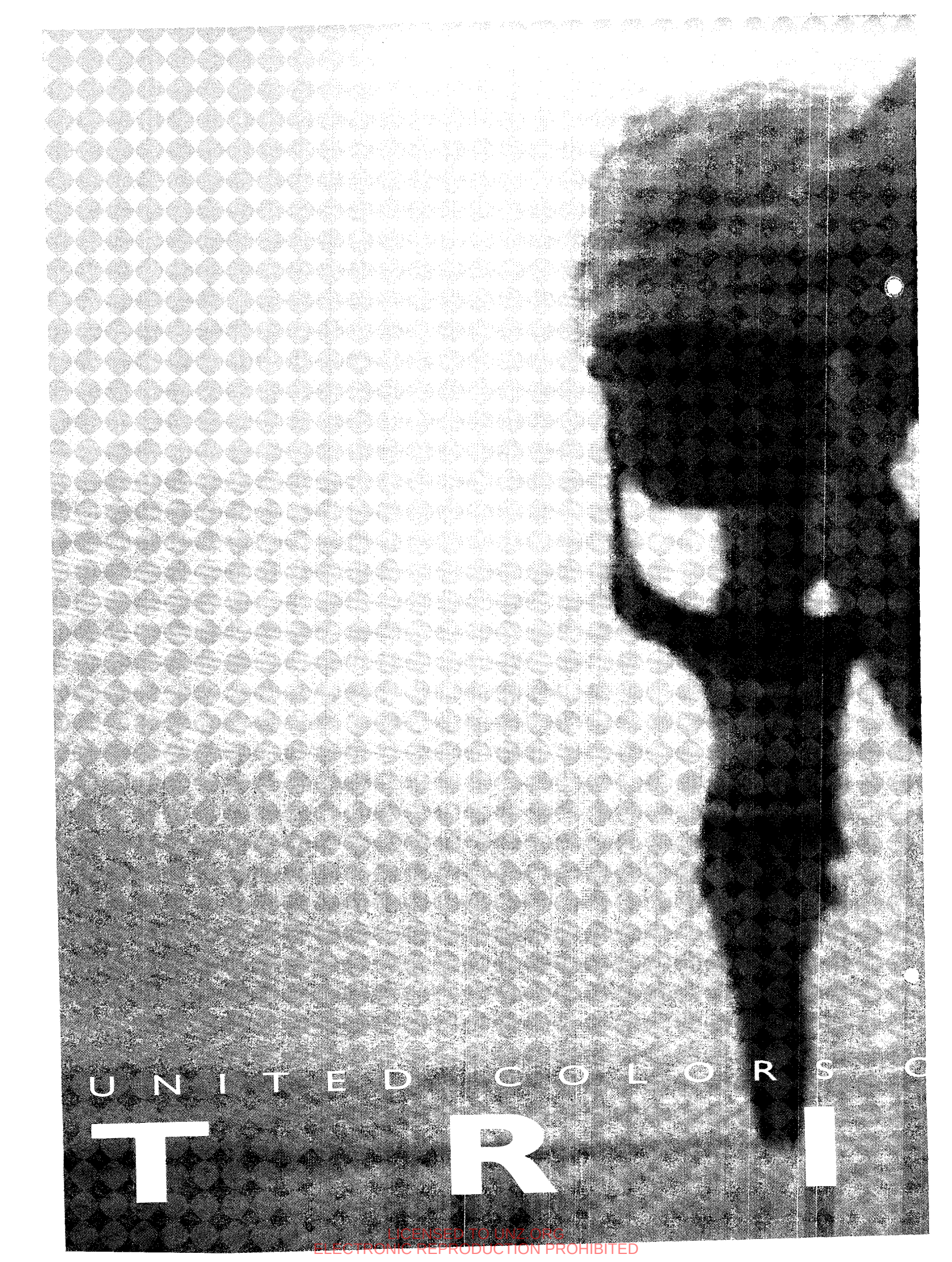
Several days later, an assistant district attorney called to say she had been assigned to the case. She would have called sooner, but it had taken some time to identify the suspect; he had given a false name at first. Now he had been arraigned, and his mother was attempting to raise the ten-thousand-dollar bail. I asked her how they could consider letting him out. The first thing he will do, I told her, is steal something and get high. It is all he does. She ignored my comments, and sought assurance that I would testify. "I'll be there," I said sourly. "But he won't."

The A.D.A. called again the next day to tell me that the robber, whose name was Robert Williams, would not be bailed. He had been out on parole, having served nine years of a seven-to-fourteen-year sentence for first-degree rape. She asked me to come to her office for an interview before I testified for the grand jury.

Our meeting was businesslike. I had to be nice, because only she could get Mr. Williams even a fraction of the time he deserved. Since he would be returning to prison to serve the rest of his rape sentence, there was a good chance he would do no time for robbing me. Before I went in to the grand jury, she told me that the .25 had been found to be inoperable, and that meant he could not be charged with the highest count of armed robbery. This infuriated me.

The grand jury consisted of twenty-three fellow New Yorkers, mostly older people, and mainly women, who listened attentively as I answered the questions put to me by the prosecutor. They sat in elevated semicircular rows that allowed





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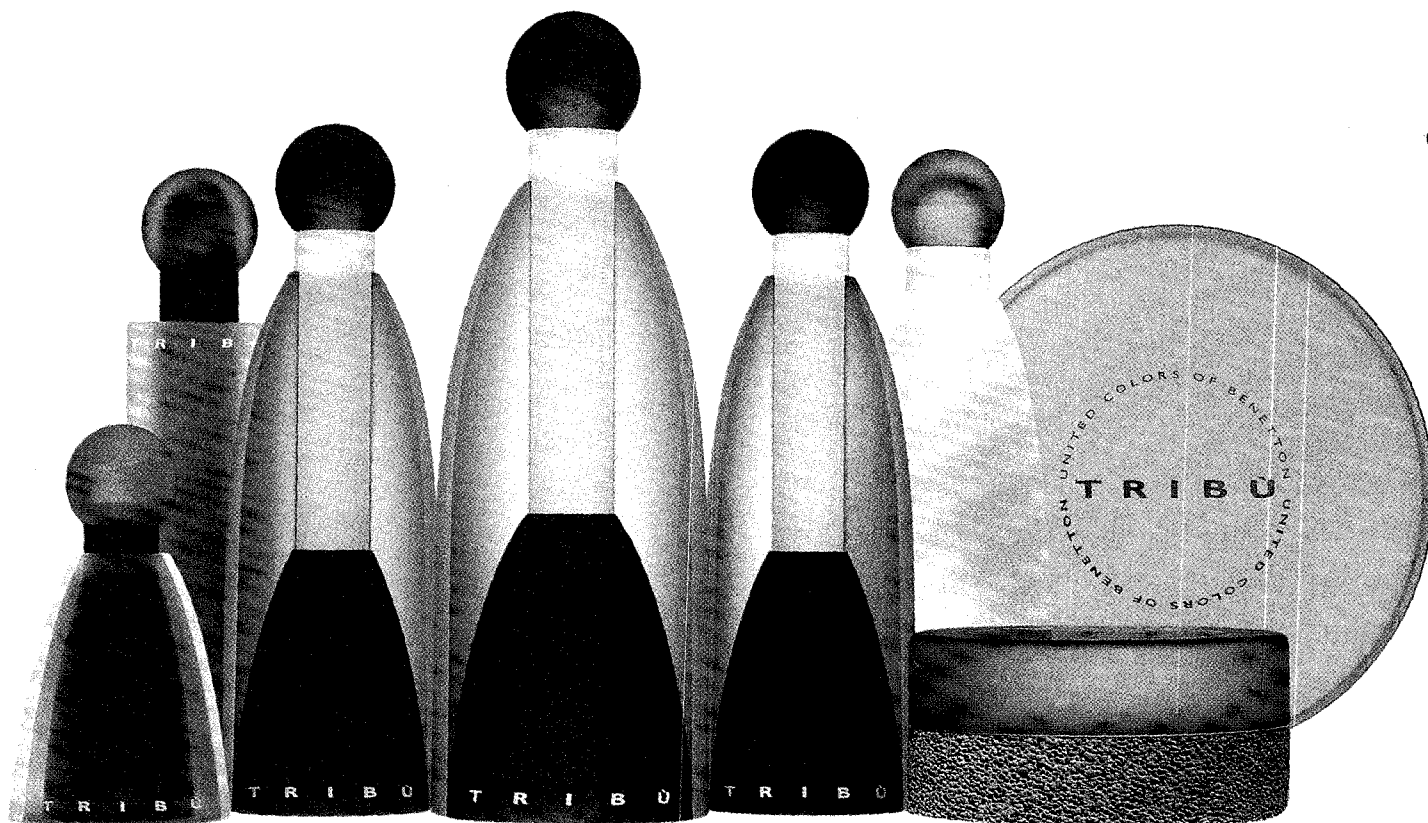
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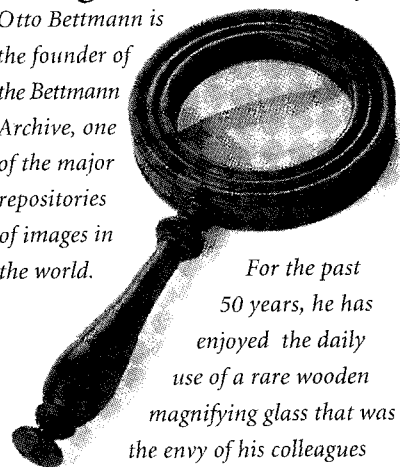
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As I handed out condoms for the needle-exchange program, I looked into the eyes of the friendly clients receiving their free drug paraphernalia. Sure, most of them were down and out, but they seemed congenial, coherent—not different, really, from any group of people you might meet in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles. When I thought of Robert Williams, I wondered what each of them had done in order to get the money to shoot up. How many had taken something from another—friend or stranger—by force or threat, robbing that person of property,

Robert Williams will be forty-nine when he is released from prison, if he serves his entire ten-year sentence. I know that if he attempted to rob me again, I would kill him without hesitation. But if he stood in line with the other users at Burnside and Jerome, or at 126th and Lex, chatting, waiting, when his turn came I would serve him without hesitation, offer him any advice he might seek about health care and shelter, and wish him Godspeed. ♦

Larger Than Life

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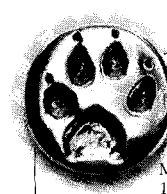
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Since her suicide, in 1963, the poet Sylvia Plath has drawn a succession of biographers to her unquiet grave. In death, as in life, she raises uncomfortable questions about her identity—and about the nature of biography itself.

BY JANET MALCOLM

TED HUGHES wrote two versions of his foreword to "The Journals of Sylvia Plath," a selection of diary entries covering the years between 1950 and 1962. The first version (the one that appears in the book, published in 1982) is a short, lyrical essay constructed on a single Blakean theme—the theme of a "real self" that finally emerged from among Plath's warring "false selves" and found triumphant expression in the "Ariel" poems, which were written in the last half year of her life and are the whole reason for her poetical reputation. In Hughes's view, her other writings—the short fiction she doggedly wrote and submitted, mostly unsuccessfully, to popular magazines; her novel, "The Bell Jar"; her letters; her apprentice poems, published in her first collection, "The Colossus"—"were like impurities thrown off from the various stages of the inner transformation, by-products of the internal work." He writes about a remarkable prefigurative moment:

Though I spent every day with her for six years, and was rarely separated from her for more than two or three hours at a time, I never saw her show her real self to anybody—except, perhaps, in the last three months of her life.

Her real self had showed itself in her writing, just for a moment, three years earlier, and when I heard it—the self I had married, after all, and lived with and knew well—in that brief moment, three lines recited as she went out through a doorway, I knew that what I had always felt must happen had now begun to happen, that her real self, being the real poet, would now speak for itself, and would throw off all those lesser and artificial selves that had monopolized the words up to that point. It was as if a dumb person suddenly spoke.

Hughes goes on to say that "when a real self finds language, and manages to speak, it is surely a dazzling event." However, because the "Ariel" poems reveal little about the "incidental circumstances or the crucial inner drama" that produced them, he pauses to reflect that

"maybe it is this very bareness of circumstantial detail that has excited the wilder fantasies projected by others in Sylvia Plath's name." Publication of the journals, he feels, will presumably lay some of these fantasies to rest, but he does not elaborate on how they will do this; he merely notes that they record Plath's "day to day struggle with her warring selves" and are to be exempted from his over-all characterization of her prose writings as "waste products." Hughes ends his three-page essay with a revelation that is so unexpected and so abrupt that one doesn't immediately take in its significance:

The journals exist in an assortment of notebooks and bunches of loose sheets. This selection contains perhaps a third of the whole bulk, which is now in the Neilson Library at Smith College. Two more notebooks survived for a while, maroon-backed ledgers like the '57-'59 volume, and continued the record from late '59 to within three days of her death. The last of these contained entries for several months, and I destroyed it because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The other disappeared.

The second version of the foreword, published in *Grand Street* in 1982 and, three years later, in an anthology of writings about Plath called "Ariel Ascending," edited by Paul Alexander, is considerably longer, denser, and more complex; it hasn't the elegant single-threadedness of the first version. It is as if Hughes looked at his first version and cast it aside as one of the too simple and too pretty false starts that a writer must make as a necessary part of finding out what he wants to say. (You could even call it a throwing off of impurities.) In his second foreword Hughes puts his revelation about the lost journals at the very beginning:

Sylvia Plath's journals exist as an assortment of notebooks and bunches of loose sheets, and the selection just published here contains about a third of the whole bulk. Two other notebooks survived for a while

after her death. They continued from where the surviving record breaks off in late 1959 and covered the last three years of her life. The second of these two books her husband destroyed, because he did not want her children to have to read it (in those days he regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The earlier one disappeared more recently (and may, presumably, still turn up).

We note that Hughes has made two changes. In one he holds out hope that the "disappeared" journal may eventually reappear (inviting the speculation that the journal is in fact, and may always have been, in his hands). In the other, and more crucial, change he has himself disappeared: "I destroyed" now becomes "her husband destroyed." Hughes can no longer sustain the fiction—on which all autobiographical writing is poised—that the person writing and the person being written about are a single seamless entity. In his second foreword Hughes needs to spell out his awareness of the discontinuity between the observing and the observed self: the observed self ("her husband") represents the interests of the Hughes children, who must be protected from destructive knowledge, whereas the observing self—whom he calls "we," as in "We cannot help wondering whether the lost entries for her last three years were not the more important section"—represents the interests of the reader, who wants to understand the relationship between the "Ariel" poems and the poet's life. The publication of Plath's journals was evidently undertaken to elucidate this relationship. But "her husband's" destructive act has made a kind of mockery of the enterprise, since the very journals that would cast light on the "Ariel" poems—the journals written while the poems were being composed—are the ones he destroyed and lost. This is the conundrum that Hughes must solve in his second foreword, and this is why he has, with helpless honesty (which an unsympathetic reader could mistake for



Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, visiting Hughes's parents in Yorkshire in the late summer of 1956, soon after their wedding.

evasiveness), divided himself into—you could even say lost himself in—the two selves, neither one “true” or “false,” that allegorize the impossibility of his situation as both editor and destroyer.

In the course of his second foreword Hughes makes a Houdiniesque escape from the trunk he has stuffed himself into and has had thrown in the river. As he writes of a mysterious, urgent, hermetically sealed process of psychological rebirth going on within Plath, from which the “Ariel” poems came and to which the surviving journals are a key, the warring roles of the destructive husband and the irked editor quietly recede. The jarring designations “her husband” and “we” are heard less and less frequently, and a new figure, a serene critical intelligence, enters the essay and firmly takes charge of its purposes, riveting us with the suspenseful, elating narrative of Plath’s poetic emergence. By the end of the essay, the problem of the missing journals is a dot on the distant horizon. Hughes has been able to lead us away from it because he led us up to it. When he made his confession at the end of his first version, it was as if he had suddenly rolled an impassable boulder into the reader’s path. By beginning his second version with the boulder in place, he is able to propose ways of getting around it: by acknowledging difficulty, by resisting the temptation to minimize it, by moving sideways.

Life, as we all know, does not reliably offer—as art does—a second (and a third and a thirtieth) chance to tinker with a problem, but Ted Hughes’s history seems to be uncommonly bare of the moments of mercy that allow one to undo or redo one’s actions and thus feel that life isn’t entirely tragic. Whatever Hughes might have undone or redone in his relationship to Sylvia Plath, the opportunity was taken from him when she committed suicide, in February of 1963, by putting her head in a gas oven as her two small children slept in a bedroom nearby, which she had sealed against gas fumes, and where she had placed mugs of milk and a plate of bread for them to find when they awoke. Plath and Hughes were not living together at the time of her death. They had been married for six years—she was thirty and he was thirty-two when she died—and had separated the previous fall in a turbulent way. There was another woman. It is a

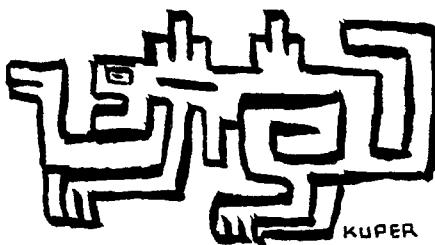
situation that many young married couples find themselves in—one that perhaps more couples find themselves in than don’t—but it is a situation that ordinarily doesn’t last: the couple either reconnects or dissolves. Life goes on. The pain and bitterness and exciting awfulness of sexual jealousy and sexual guilt recede and disappear. People grow older. They forgive themselves and each other, and may even come to realize that what they are forgiving themselves and each other for is youth.

But a person who dies at thirty in the middle of a messy separation remains forever fixed in the mess. To the readers of her poetry and her biography, Sylvia Plath will always be young and in a rage over Hughes’s unfaithfulness. She will never reach the age when the tumults of young adulthood can be looked back upon with rueful sympathy and without anger and vengeance. Ted Hughes has reached this age—he reached it some time ago—but he has been cheated of the peace that age brings by the posthumous fame of Plath and by the public’s fascination with the story of her life. Since he was part of that life—the most interesting figure in it during its final six years—he, too, remains fixed in the chaos and confusion of its final period. Like Prometheus, whose ravaged liver was daily reconstituted so it could be daily re-ravaged, Hughes has had to watch his young self being picked over by biographers, scholars, critics, article writers, and newspaper journalists. Strangers who Hughes feels know nothing about his marriage to Plath write about it with proprietary authority. “I hope each of us owns the facts of her or his own life,” Hughes wrote in a letter to the *Independent* in April, 1989, when he had been goaded by a particularly intrusive article. But, of course, as everyone knows who has ever heard a piece of gossip, we do not “own” the facts of our lives at all. This ownership passes out of our hands at birth, at the moment we are first observed. The organs of publicity that have proliferated in our time are

only an extension and a magnification of society’s fundamental and incorrigible nosiness. Our business is everybody’s business, should anybody wish to make it so. The concept of privacy is a sort of screen to hide the fact that almost none is possible in a social universe. In any struggle between the public’s inviolable right to be diverted and an individual’s wish to be left alone, the public almost always prevails. After we are dead, the pretense that we may somehow be protected against the world’s careless malice is abandoned. The branch of the law that putatively protects our good name against libel and slander withdraws from us indifferently. The dead cannot be libelled or slandered. They are without legal recourse.

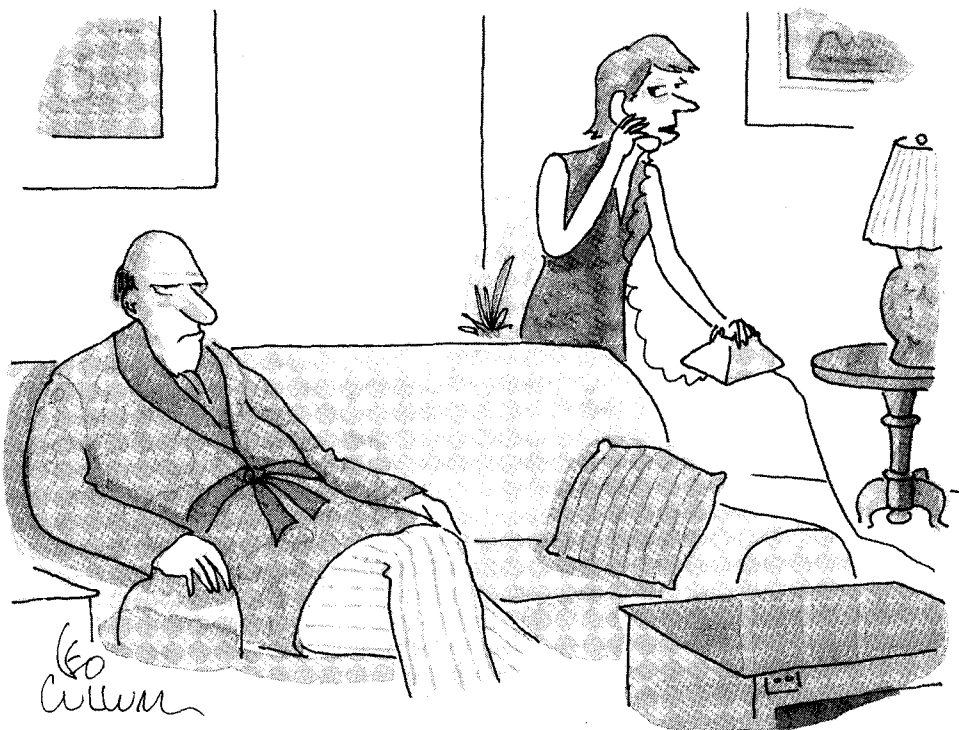
Biography is the medium through which the remaining secrets of the famous dead are taken from them and dumped out in full view of the world. The biographer at work, indeed, is like the professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through certain drawers that he has good reason to think contain the jewelry and money, and triumphantly bearing his loot away. The voyeurism and busybodyism that impel writers and readers of biography alike are obscured by an apparatus of scholarship designed to give the enterprise an appearance of banklike blandness and solidity. The biographer is portrayed almost as a kind of benefactor. He is seen as sacrificing years of his life to his task, tirelessly sitting in archives and libraries and patiently conducting interviews with witnesses. There is no length he will not go to, and the more his book reflects his industry the more the reader believes that he is having an elevating literary experience, rather than simply listening to backstairs gossip and reading other people’s mail. The transgressive nature of biography is rarely acknowledged, but it is the only explanation for biography’s status as a popular genre. The reader’s amazing tolerance (which he would extend to no novel written half as badly as most biographies) makes sense only when seen as a kind of collusion between him and the biographer in an excitingly forbidden undertaking: tiptoeing down the corridor together, to stand in front of the bedroom door and try to peep through the keyhole.

Every now and then, a biography comes along that strangely displeases



the public. Something causes the reader to back away from the writer and refuse to accompany him down the corridor. What the reader has usually heard in the text—what has alerted him to danger—is the sound of doubt, the sound of a crack opening in the wall of the biographer's self-assurance. As a burglar should not pause to discuss with his accomplice the rights and wrongs of burglary while he is jimmying a lock, so a biographer ought not to introduce doubts about the legitimacy of the biographical enterprise. The biography-loving public does not want to hear that biography is a flawed genre. It prefers to believe that certain biographers are bad guys.

This is what happened to Anne Stevenson, the author of a biography of Sylvia Plath called *"Bitter Fame,"* which is by far the most intelligent and the only aesthetically satisfying of the five biographies of Plath written to date. The other four are: *"Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness"* (1976), by Edward Butscher; *"Sylvia Plath: A Biography"* (1987), by Linda Wagner-Martin; *"The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath"* (1991), by Ronald Hayman; and *"Rough Magic: A Biography of Sylvia Plath"* (1991), by Paul Alexander. In Stevenson's book, which was published in 1989, the cracking of the wall was all too audible. *"Bitter Fame"* was brutally attacked, and Anne Stevenson herself was pilloried; the book became known and continues to be known in the Plath world as a "bad" book. The misdeed for which Stevenson could not be forgiven was to hesitate before the keyhole. "Any biography of Sylvia Plath written during the lifetimes of her family and friends must take their vulnerability into consideration, even if completeness suffers from it," she wrote in her preface. This is a most remarkable—in fact, a thoroughly subversive—statement for a biographer to make. To take vulnerability into consideration! To show compunction! To spare feelings! To not push as far as one can! What is the woman thinking of? The biographer's business, like the journalist's, is to satisfy the reader's curiosity, not to place limits on it. He is supposed to go out and bring back the goods—the malevolent secrets that have been quietly



"I'd love to, Barbara, but I'll have to check with the Bundesbank."

burning in archives and libraries and in the minds of contemporaries who have been biding their time, waiting for the biographer's knock on their doors. Some of the secrets are difficult to bring away, and some, jealously guarded by relatives, are even impossible. Relatives are the biographer's natural enemies; they are like the hostile tribes an explorer encounters and must ruthlessly subdue to claim his territory. If the relatives behave like friendly tribes, as they occasionally do—if they propose to cooperate with the biographer, even to the point of making him "official" or "authorized"—he still has to assert his authority and strut about to show that he is the big white man and they are just the naked savages. Thus, for example, when Bernard Crick agreed to be George Orwell's authorized biographer he first had to ritually bring Orwell's widow to her knees. "She agreed to my firm condition that as well as complete access to the papers, I should have an absolute and prior waiver of copyright so that I could quote what I liked and write what I liked. These were hard terms, even if the only terms on which, I think, a scholar should and can take on a contemporary biography," Crick writes with weary pride in an essay entitled "On the

Difficulties of Writing Biography in General and of Orwell's in Particular." When Sonia Orwell read excerpts from Crick's manuscript and realized the worthlessness of the trinkets she had traded her territory for (her fantasy that Crick saw Orwell exactly as she saw him, and viewed her marriage to Orwell exactly as she viewed it), she tried to rescind the agreement. She could not do so, of course. Crick's statement is a model of biographical rectitude. His "hard terms" are the reader's guarantee of quality, like the standards set by the Food and Drug Administration. They assure the reader that he is getting something pure and wholesome, not something that has been tampered with.

When Anne Stevenson's biography arrived, it looked like damaged goods. The wrapping was coming undone, the label looked funny, there was no nice piece of cotton at the top of the bottle. Along with the odd statement about the book's intentional incompleteness, there was a most suspicious-looking Author's Note on the opening page. "In writing this biography, I have received a great deal of help from Olwyn Hughes," Stevenson said. (Olwyn Hughes is Ted Hughes's older sister and the former literary agent to the Plath estate.) "Ms.

Hughes's contributions to the text have made it almost a work of dual authorship. I am particularly grateful for the work she did on the last four chapters and on the Ariel poems of the autumn of 1962." The note ended with an asterisk that led to a footnote citing exactly which poems Olwyn Hughes had done work on. As if all this weren't peculiar enough, the Author's Note in the published book differed from the Author's Note in the galleys sent to reviewers, which read, "This biography of Sylvia Plath is the result of a three-year dialogue between the author and Olwyn Hughes, agent to the Plath Estate. Ms. Hughes has contributed so liberally to the text that this is in effect a work of joint authorship."

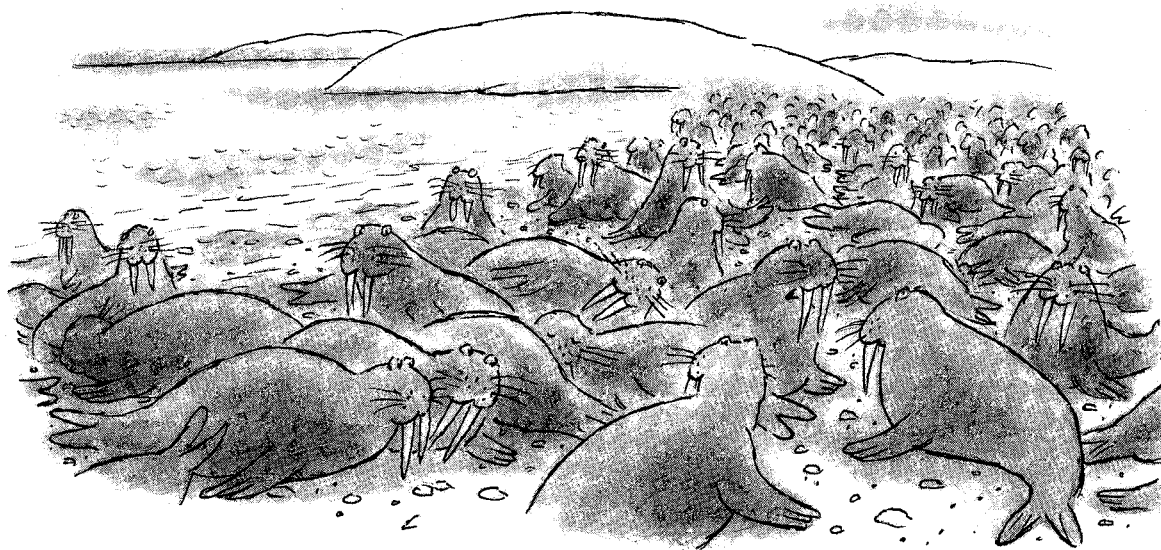
Anne Stevenson apparently had not subdued the natives but had been captured by them and subjected to God knows what tortures. The book she had finally staggered back to civilization with was repudiated by many as a piece of worthless native propaganda, rather than the "truthful" and "objective" work it should have been. She was seen as having been used by Ted and Olwyn Hughes to put forward their version of Ted Hughes's relations with Plath. Hughes has been extremely reticent about his life with Plath; he has written no memoir, he gives no interviews, his writings about her work (in a number of

introductions to volumes of her poetry and prose) are always about the work, and touch on biography only when it relates to the work. It evidently occurred to no one that if Hughes was indeed speaking about his marriage to Plath through Stevenson this might add to the biography's value, not decrease it.

WHEN I first read "Bitter Fame," in the late summer of 1989, I knew nothing of the charged situation surrounding it, nor was I impelled by any great interest in Sylvia Plath. The book had been sent to me by its publisher, and what aroused my interest was the name Anne Stevenson. Anne had been a fellow-student of mine at the University of Michigan in the nineteen-fifties. She was in the class ahead of me, and I did not know her, but I knew of her, as the daughter of an eminent and popular professor of philosophy and as a girl who was arty—who wrote poetry that appeared in *Generation*, the university's literary magazine, and who had won the Hopwood award, a serious literary prize. She had once been pointed out to me on the street: thin and pretty, with an atmosphere of awkward intensity and passion about her, gesticulating, surrounded by interesting-looking boys. In those days, I greatly admired artiness, and Anne Stevenson was one of the figures who glowed with a special incan-

descence in my imagination. She seemed to embody and to have come by naturally all the romantic qualities that I and my fellow fainthearted rebels against the dreariness of the Eisenhower years yearned toward, as we stumblingly, and largely unsuccessfully, attempted to live out our fantasies of nonconformity. Over the years, I watched Anne achieve the literary success she had been headed toward at Michigan. I had begun to write, too, but I did not envy or feel competitive with her: she was in a different sphere, a higher, almost sacred place—the stratosphere of poetry. Moreover, she had married an Englishman and moved to England—the England of E. M. Forster, G. B. Shaw, Max Beer-bohm, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Henry James, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence—and that only fixed her the more firmly in my imagination as a figure of literary romance. When, in the mid-seventies, I read Anne's book-length poem "Correspondences," a kind of novel in letters, a chronicle of quiet (and sometimes not so quiet) domestic despair over several generations, my vague admiration found a sturdy object. The book showed Anne to be not only a poet of arresting technical accomplishment but a woman who had lived, and could speak about her encounters with the real in a tough, modern woman's voice. (She could also modulate it into the softer tones of nineteenth-century moral thought.)

The years passed, and one day a poem by Anne Stevenson appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* entitled "A Legacy: On My Fiftieth Birthday." Anne was now a grand literary lady. Her poem was full of poets and editors and critics and friends and children and dogs, and its tone of intimate allusiveness evoked a society of remarkable people meeting in each other's burnished houses and talking about literature and ideas in their quiet, kind English voices. I briefly



S. GROSS

"In a former life, I used to go to Palm Beach."

considered writing Anne a note of congratulation and identifying myself as an old Michigan schoolmate—and didn't. Her society seemed too closed, sufficient unto itself.

More years went by when I didn't hear or think about Anne Stevenson; then "Bitter Fame" brought her into my imaginative life again. I read the early chapters about Plath's childhood and adolescence and college years with pangs of rueful recognition—the three of us were almost the same age—and with a certain surprise at the accuracy and authority of Anne's evocation of what it had been like to be a young person living in America in the nineteen-fifties. How did Anne know about it? I had placed her far above and beyond the shames and humiliations and hypocrisies in which the rest of us were helplessly implicated. Evidently, she knew about them all too well. "Middle-class teenage Americans in the 1950s subscribed to an amazing code of sexual frustration," she writes, and continues:

Everything was permissible to girls in the way of intimacy except the one thing such intimacies were intended to bring about. Both partners in the ritual of experimental sex conceded that "dating" went something like this: preliminary talking and polite mutual inspection led to dancing, which often shifted into "necking," which—assuming continuous progress—concluded in the quasi-masturbation of "petting" on the family sofa, or, in more affluent circumstances, in the back seat of a car. Very occasionally intercourse might, inadvertently, take place; but as a rule, if the partners went to the same school or considered themselves subject to the same moral pressures, they stopped just short of it.

When writing of how Plath, in her senior year at Smith, daringly matriculated from petting to sleeping with her boyfriends, and deceived her mother about her activities, Anne is moved to observe: "Many women who, like myself, were students in America in the 1950s will remember duplicities of this kind. Sylvia's double standard was quite usual, as was the acceptable face she assumed in letters to her mother. My own letters home of the time were not dissimilar."

The early chapters of "Bitter Fame" pulled me back into a period that I still find troubling to recall, precisely because duplicity was so closely woven into its fabric. We lied to our parents and we lied to each other and we lied to ourselves, so addicted to deception had we

become. We were an uneasy, shifty-eyed generation. Only a few of us could see how it was with us. When Ted Hughes writes about the struggle of Plath's "true self" to emerge from her false one, he is surely writing about a historical as well as a personal crisis. The nineteenth century came to an end in America only in the nineteen-sixties; the desperate pretense that the two World Wars had left the world as unchanged as the Boer War had left it was finally stripped away by the sexual revolution, the women's movement, the civil-rights movement, the environmental movement, the Vietnam War protests. Sylvia Plath and Anne Stevenson and I came of age in the period when the need to keep up the pretense was especially strong: no one was prepared—least of all the shaken returning G.I.s—to face the post-Hiroshima and post-Auschwitz world. At the end of her life, Plath looked, with unnerving steadiness, at the Gorgon; her late poems name and invoke the bomb and the death camps. She was able—she had been elected—to confront what most of the rest of us fearfully shrank from. "For goodness sake, stop being so *frightened* of everything, Mother!" she wrote to Aurelia Plath in October, 1962. "Almost every other word in your letter is 'frightened.'" In the same letter she said:

Now stop trying to get me to write about "decent courageous people"—read the *Ladies' Home Journal* for those! It's too bad my poems frighten you—but you've always been afraid of reading or seeing the world's hardest things—like Hiroshima, the Inquisition or Belsen.

But Plath's engagement with "the world's hardest things" came only just before she killed herself. (Robert Lowell wrote in his introduction to "Ariel," "This poetry and life are not a career; they tell that life, even when disciplined, is simply not worth it.") The history of her life—as it has now been told in the five biographies and in innumerable essays and critical studies—is a signature story of the fearful, double-faced fifties. Plath embodies in a vivid, almost emblematic way the schizoid character of the period. She is the divided self par excellence. The taut surrealism of the late poems and the slack, girls'-book realism of her life (as rendered by Plath's biographers and by her own autobiographical

writings) are grotesquely incongruous. The photographs of Plath as a vacuous girl of the fifties, with dark lipstick and blond hair, add to one's sense of the jarring disparity between the life and the work. In "Bitter Fame," writing with the affectionate asperity of a sibling, Anne Stevenson draws a portrait of Plath as a highly self-involved and confused, unstable, driven, perfectionistic, rather humorless young woman, whose suicide remains a mystery, as does the source of her art, and who doesn't add up.

As I read the book, certain vague, dissatisfied thoughts I had had while reading other biographies began to come into sharper focus. It was only later, when the bad report of the book had spread and I had learned about some of the circumstances of its writing, that I understood why it gave the sense of being as much about the problems of biographical writing as about Sylvia Plath. At the time, I thought that it was Sylvia Plath herself who was mischievously subverting the biographer's project. The many voices in which the dead girl spoke—the voices of the journals, of her letters, of "The Bell Jar," of the short stories, of the early poems, of the "Ariel" poems—mocked the whole idea of biographical narrative. The more Anne Stevenson fleshed out Plath's biography with quotations from her writings, the thinner, paradoxically, did her own narrative seem. The voices began to take over the book and to speak to the reader over the biographer's head. They whispered, "Listen to me, not to her. I am authentic. I speak with authority. Go to the full texts of the journals, the letters home, and the rest. They will tell you what you want to know." These voices were joined by another chorus—that of people who had actually known Plath. These, too, said, "Don't listen to Anne Stevenson. She didn't know Sylvia. I knew Sylvia. Let me tell you about her. Read my correspondence with her. Read my memoir." Three of these voices were particularly loud—those of Lucas Myers, Dido Merwin, and Richard Murphy, who had written memoirs of Plath and Hughes that appeared as appendixes in "Bitter Fame." One of them, Merwin's, entitled "Vessel of Wrath," rose to the pitch of a shriek. The memoir caused a sensa-



tion: it was deplored because of its excess.

Dido Merwin couldn't stand Plath, and had waited thirty years to tell the world what she thought of her former "friend," depicting her as the unbearable wife of a long-suffering martyr. According to Merwin, the wonder was not that Hughes left Plath but that he "stuck it out as long as he did." After the separation, Merwin writes, she asked Hughes "what had been hardest to take during the time he and Sylvia were together," and he revealed that Plath, in a fit of jealous rage, had torn into small pieces all his work-in-progress of the winter of 1961, as well as his copy of Shakespeare. Merwin also recalls as if it had happened yesterday a disastrous visit that Plath and Hughes paid her and her then husband, the poet W. S. Merwin, at their farmhouse, in the Dordogne. Plath "used up all the hot water, repeatedly helped herself from the fridge (breakfasting on what one had planned to serve for lunch, etc.), and rearranged the furniture in their bedroom." She cast such a pall with her sulking (though her appetite never diminished, Merwin notes, and tells of balefully watching Plath attack a fine foie gras "for all the world as though it were 'Aunt Dot's meat loaf'") that Hughes had to cut the visit short. Anne Stevenson was heavily criticized for giving an "unbalanced" idea of Plath by including this venomous portrait in her biography.

In fact, where Anne Stevenson made her mistake of balance was not in including such a negative view of Plath but in including such a subversively lively piece of writing. The limitations of biographical writing are never more evident than when one turns from it to writing in another genre; and when, led by a footnote, I turned from the text of "Bitter Fame" to Dido Merwin's memoir I felt as if I had been freed from prison. The hushed cautiousness, the solemn weighing of "evidence," the humble "she must have felt"s and "he probably thought"s of biographical writing had given way to a high-spirited subjectivity. Writing in her own voice as her own person, fettered by no rules of epistemological deportment, Dido could let rip. She knew exactly how she felt and what she thought. The contrast between the omniscient narrator of "Bitter Fame," whose mantle of pallid judiciousness

Anne Stevenson was obliged to wear, and the robustly intemperate "I" of the Merwin memoir is striking. Merwin's portrait of Plath is a self-portrait of Merwin, of course. It is she, rather than Plath, who emerges, larger than life, from "Vessel of Wrath," and whose obliterating vividness led readers into their error of questioning Anne Stevenson's motives.

THE first of the bad reviews of "Bitter Fame"—a powerful harbinger—appeared in the September 28, 1989, issue of *The New York Review of Books* and was by the English writer A. Alvarez. Alvarez was a logical choice to review "Bitter Fame." As poetry editor of the *Observer* in the nineteen-sixties, he was one of the first people in England to recognize Plath's talent; he had published several of her poems in the *Observer*. In 1971, he had himself written a memoir of Plath; it appeared as the first chapter of "The Savage God," a book he wrote about suicide, and it was the first account in print to give details of Plath's death. Like Dido Merwin's memoir—like every memoir—Alvarez's is a work of autobiography, though what Merwin does naively and unwittingly he does artfully and consciously. He works his recollections of Plath into a kind of allegory of suicidal drive; the depression and disorder of his own life (he tells us he swallowed forty-five sleeping pills a decade earlier) are fused with and metaphorized by the last act of her life, when she gambled with fate—as Alvarez characterizes it, and as he himself did—and lost. Alvarez argues, giving chilling details, that Plath meant to be found and saved, and that she died only because of a freakish series of accidents. His argument is compelling and horrifying.

But it is a second narrative, a sort of sub-allegory, that gives Alvarez's memoir its high verve and also its status as a foundation text of the Plath legend. This is the narrative of the flow of power between husband and wife—the story of how, during the two years of his acquaintance with Plath and Hughes, Alvarez watched power go from one to the other, like water poured from one pitcher into another. At first, the husband was the full vessel. "This was Ted's time," Alvarez writes about Hughes when he first met him, in London, in the spring of 1960; Hughes's second

book of poems, "Lupercal," had just appeared and Alvarez thought it "the best book by a young poet that I had read since I began my stint on the *Observer*." Alvarez goes on to describe the poet himself: "He was a tall, strong-looking man in a black corduroy jacket, black trousers, black shoes; his dark hair hung untidily forward; he had a long, witty mouth. He was in command." In contrast, he says, Plath was just a banal little housewife, "briskly American: bright, clean, competent, like a young woman in a cookery advertisement." Alvarez didn't notice her very much then. He reports an embarrassing moment when, as he and Hughes were going out the door (the two of them would take walks or go to the pub, while Plath stayed home), Plath shyly stopped him and mentioned a poem of hers that he had accepted for publication in the *Observer* the previous year. At first, Alvarez didn't know what she was talking about—he simply didn't connect the bright, clean housewife with the world of poetry, and hadn't known that her writing name was Plath. Later that year, when Plath's first book of poems, "The Colossus," was published in England, Alvarez reviewed it for the *Observer*. "It seemed to fit the image I had of her: serious, gifted, withheld, and still partly under the massive shadow of her husband," he writes in his memoir. He praised Plath's poems for their technical proficiency but felt that something was being held back: "Beneath most of the poems was a sense of resources and disturbances not yet tapped."

Alvarez went to America to teach for a term, and when he returned to London, in February of 1961, his relationship with the couple attenuated: "Ted had fallen out of love with London and was fretting to get away; Sylvia had been ill—first a miscarriage, then appendicitis—and I had my own problems, a divorce." When he saw them next, in June, 1962, they were living in Devon, in Court Green, an old manor house with a thatched roof and a cobbled courtyard and a big wild garden and orchard, next to a twelfth-century church. It was now Sylvia's time, Alvarez reports:

They had had a new baby in January, a boy [Nicholas], and Sylvia had changed. No longer quiet and withheld, a housewifely appendage to a powerful husband, she seemed made solid and complete, her own woman again. Perhaps the birth of a son

SUMMER IN THE CITY BY DAVID GOLDIN

MANHATTAN





"Katie Couric will do that to you."

had something to do with this new confident air. But there was a sharpness and clarity about her that seemed to go beyond that. It was she who showed me around the house and the garden; the electric gadgets, the freshly painted rooms, the orchard . . . were *her* property.

And Ted: he "seemed content to sit back and play with little Frieda [his two-year-old daughter], who clung to him dependently." Alvarez adds, a little nervously, "Since it appeared to be a strong, close marriage, I suppose he was unconcerned that the balance of power had shifted for the time being to her."

By the fall of 1962, the strong, close marriage had failed, and Hughes had moved back to London. Plath remained in Devon with the children, travelling to London from time to time on literary business. She began to visit Alvarez regularly in his studio, a converted stable in Hampstead, and read to him from her new work. Alvarez was now more Plath's friend than Hughes's. He parts the curtain and permits us a glimpse of himself and Plath in the studio:

[It] was beautiful in its crumbling way, but uncomfortable; there was nothing to lounge on—only spidery Windsor chairs and a couple of rugs on the blood-red

uncarpeted lino. I poured her a drink and she settled in front of the coal stove on one of the rugs, like a student, very much at her ease, sipping whiskey and making the ice clink in her glass.

The poems that Plath read to Alvarez were the poems that are now taught in literature courses—"Ariel," "Lady Lazarus," "Daddy," "The Applicant," "Fever 103°," the bee poems, "A Birthday Present"—and their destructive and unforgiving force, he reports, so shook him that to maintain his equilibrium he resorted to small, picky criticisms; one that he now particularly regrets was of a line in "Lady Lazarus," which Plath took out at his suggestion. After the reading of the poetry and Alvarez's criticism of it, the talk would become more personal. "Perhaps because I was also a member of the club," Alvarez writes, Plath told him about her first suicide attempt, in the summer of 1953 (she, too, had swallowed a bottleful of sleeping pills), and about a more recent incident of driving her car off the road.

However, the relationship between the critic and the poet did not go where it seemed to be going. Alvarez backed off from Plath. "She must have felt I was stupid and insensitive. Which I was," he

writes of their last meeting, on Christmas Eve of 1962, less than two months before her death. "But to have been otherwise would have meant accepting responsibilities I didn't want and couldn't, in my own depression, have coped with." By this time, Plath, too, had left Devon for London, and was living on Fitzroy Road in a flat that Alvarez found chillingly orderly and austere. She had invited him for dinner, but he was engaged elsewhere and only stopped in for a drink. "When I left about eight o'clock to go on to my dinner party, I knew I had let her down in some final and unforgivable way. And I knew she knew. I never again saw her alive."

Alvarez's memoir set the tone for the writing about Plath and Hughes

that was to follow; it erected the structure on which the narrative of Plath as an abandoned and mistreated woman and Hughes as a heartless betrayer was to be strung. Although Alvarez is extremely discreet and gives no details of Hughes and Plath's separation—about which, in fact, he knew a great deal—it is not hard to read his self-castigation as a veiled accusation against Hughes, whose rejection of Plath was, after all, much more profoundly final and unforgivable. The ordeal of Ted Hughes could be said to date from the publication of Alvarez's memoir in "The Savage God" and its serialization in the *Observer*. Hughes was immediately aware of the destructive power of the piece, and he succeeded in getting the second half of the memoir pulled from the *Observer*, but he could do nothing about its appearance in "The Savage God," or about its subsequent influence.

Once the plot of the suicidal poetess and her abandonment by the man with the witty mouth was released into the world, there would be no end to the variations played on it, or to Hughes's burial alive in each of its retellings. When "Bitter Fame" appeared, declaring that it would "dispel the posthumous

miasma of fantasy, rumor, politics, and ghoulish gossip" that was feeding Plath's "perverse legend," it was hardly surprising that the book was not greeted with open arms. The world likes to hold on to its fantasy, rumor, politics, and ghoulish gossip, not dispel them, and nobody wanted to hear that it was Hughes who was good and Plath who was bad. The pleasure of hearing ill of the dead is not a negligible one, but it pales before the pleasure of hearing ill of the living. There is simply no choice between a dead bad guy and a live one. Given the task of reviewing a book whose declared object was to dismantle the narrative that he himself had set in motion, Alvarez could hardly have been expected to look upon it favorably. He raked over "Bitter Fame," and when he was finished there were three bad guys where previously only one had stood: to Ted Hughes were now added Anne Stevenson and Olwyn Hughes. An ancillary narrative was born of Alvarez's review—the narrative of the corrupt biographer and the evil sister.

THE ground had been prepared for this narrative by the biography of Plath written by Linda Wagner-Martin, a professor of English then at Michigan State University. The chief interest of this book, which is written in a style as blandly unpretentious as a young girl's diary ("Dick had gone to Florida during spring break, he and Perry had just taken a trip to Maine, and now he was going to Arizona. In contrast, she stayed in Wellesley and mowed the grass"), is its preface, in which Wagner-Martin boldly speaks out about her unhappy dealings with the Plath estate:

When I began researching this biography in 1982, I contacted Olwyn Hughes, who is literary executor of the Sylvia Plath estate. Olwyn was initially cooperative, and helped me in my research by answering questions herself and referring me to others who could be of assistance. As Olwyn read the later chapters of the book, however, and particularly after she read a draft of the manuscript in 1986, her cooperation diminished substantially. Olwyn wrote me at great length, usually in argument with my views about the life and development of Plath. Ted Hughes responded to a reading of the manuscript in draft form in 1986 with suggestions for changes that filled fifteen pages and would have meant a deletion of more than 15,000 words.

Of necessity I continued to correspond with Olwyn Hughes in order to obtain per-

MEDUSA

Off that landspit of stony mouth-plugs,
Eyes rolled by white sticks,
Ears cupping the sea's incoherences,
You house your unnerving head—God-ball,
Lens of mercies,

Your stooges
Plying their wild cells in my keel's shadow,
Pushing by like hearts,
Red stigmata at the very center,
Riding the rip tide to the nearest point of departure,

Dragging their Jesus hair.
Did I escape, I wonder?
My mind winds to you
Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable,
Keeping itself, it seems, in a state of miraculous repair.

In any case, you are always there,
Tremulous breath at the end of my line,
Curve of water upleaping
To my water rod, dazzling and grateful,
Touching and sucking.

I didn't call you.
I didn't call you at all.
Nevertheless, nevertheless
You steamed to me over the sea,
Fat and red, a placenta

Paralysing the kicking lovers.
Cobra light
Squeezing the breath from the blood bells
Of the fuchsia. I could draw no breath,
Dead and moneyless,

Overexposed, like an X-ray.
Who do you think you are?
A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?
I shall take no bite of your body,
Bottle in which I live,

Ghastly Vatican.
I am sick to death of hot salt.
Green as eunuchs, your wishes
Hiss at my sins.
Off, off, eely tentacle!

There is nothing between us.

—SYLVIA PLATH
(October 16, 1962)

mission to quote at length from Plath's works. But on every occasion Olwyn objected to the manuscript, frequently citing Ted Hughes's comments (although, as mentioned earlier, Ted Hughes refused to be interviewed directly for the book). I did make many changes in response to these comments. However, the requests for changes continued, and I concluded that permissions would be granted only if I agreed to change the manuscript to reflect the Hugheses' points of view. When I realized that this tactic would continue indefinitely, I had to end my attempt to gain permission to quote at length if I was ever to publish this book. As a result of this circumstance, I have had to limit quotations. Consequently, this biography contains less of Plath's writing than I had intended. The alternative would have been to agree to suggestions that would have changed the point of view of this book appreciably.

In his review of "Bitter Fame" Alvarez quotes this passage, holding it up as the "typical" experience of unauthorized biographers of Plath. He commends the plucky Linda Wagner-Martin for standing up to the estate and writing "a mildly feminist but otherwise careful and evenhanded account of the life" (note the "but"), and rendering an "admiring and forgiving" portrait. The supine Anne Stevenson, in contrast, is censured for caving in under the pressure of the evil sister and writing a book that Alvarez sees as "more than 350 pages of disparagement." Of the Dido Merwin memoir in the appendix, Alvarez writes that it is "a work of sustained and quite astonishing venom and what is most tasteless about it is not that it should have been written about someone who can no longer defend herself but that it should be published in a biography commissioned and approved by the Plath estate." As in his own memoir of Plath, Alvarez once again presents Ted Hughes as a recessive figure, about whom he elaborately speaks no ill but who is damned by his very recessiveness. Since "Ted Hughes has steadfastly refused to be involved in the biographical wrangling," Alvarez writes, Plath, the defenseless dead woman, has been left abandoned to the mercies of the cruel Olwyn. Once again, Hughes has evaporated when Plath needed him most, and once again Alvarez has stepped in to play the role of Plath's champion and (as it proved) Hughes's nemesis.

What Alvarez left delicately unsaid but hovering in the air was quickly picked up by other reviewers of "Bitter Fame" and run into the ground. In one

of the crassest of the post-Alvarez reviews, in the November 10, 1989, *Independent*, Ronald Hayman writes, "At the core of this vindictive book are two strategies. One is to lay the blame for the break-up of the marriage squarely on Sylvia Plath by depicting her behaviour as so consistently outrageous that no husband could have put up with it for long, while Ted Hughes is characterised as patient, generous, warm, innocent, reluctant to be unfaithful. The other strategy is to undermine her poetic achievement by representing her verse as negative, sick, death-oriented, and comparing it unfavorably with his." Hayman complains:

There is also very little about Assia Wevill, the woman for whom Ted Hughes left Sylvia Plath. We are given the impression that the only relevant conversations between husband and wife were two in which Plath ordered Hughes out of the house, and we are told Assia said her affair with him would never have begun "had Sylvia behaved differently." This conflicts with the impression formed by many of the people who knew them, and it ignores the account given in a privately published memoir by Professor Trevor Thomas, who lived in the flat underneath and was the last man to see Sylvia alive. Calling Assia a Jezebel, a scarlet woman, she told the professor [Assia] had stolen her husband.

Hayman continues:

Nor is there any reason to doubt [Thomas's] account of meetings with Ted Hughes, who blamed him for locking the front door, "so they couldn't get in and save my wife." On the day of the funeral a party was held in the flat with records and bongo drums. Later on, Assia, whom [Thomas] describes as "a very beautiful woman," told him that Hughes had been so distressed that "some of us decided to have a party to surprise him and cheer him up when he got back home."

"Fantasy, rumor, politics, and ghoulish gossip" are represented here in their most unconstrained and ugly guise. As it happens, there is every reason to doubt Trevor Thomas's account, and when Ted Hughes challenged its veracity before an organization called the Press Council he was upheld (the *Independent* published a correction and apology), and when he brought legal action against Thomas he similarly prevailed. (Thomas died on May 27th of this year.) But the harm was done—or redone. The narrative of the faithless, heartless Hughes and his Jezebel could not be dislodged. "Bitter Fame," far from altering the old image of Hughes,

only entrenched it further in the public imagination. The patient got sicker from the attempted cure. The doctors (who had already quarrelled, as doctors do in hopeless cases) withdrew in disarray. Deep pathologies of biography and of journalism began to fuse, and to engender virulent new strains of the bacillus of bad faith. As a susceptible member of the journalist tribe myself, I began to feel the early symptoms of infection: the familiar stirrings of reportorial desire.

In December, 1989, I wrote to Ted Hughes, in care of his sister (as I had been told to do by his publisher), and asked him for an interview, saying, among other things, that I thought of the Plath biographical situation as a kind of allegory of the problem of biography in general. By return post I received a long letter from Olwyn Hughes. I read it in wonder and awe. We all move through the world surrounded by an atmosphere that is unique to us and by which we may be recognized as clearly as by our faces. Some of us, however, have thicker atmospheres than others, and a few of us have an atmosphere of such opacity that it hides us entirely from view—we seem to be nothing but our atmosphere. Olwyn Hughes is like this. Her letter was that of a person so intensely preoccupied and so passionately aggrieved that she simply could not be bothered to explain what she was talking about. She just hurtled headlong into her subject, "the myth of Sylvia Plath," and I was left to follow her or not—it was all the same to her. She wasn't there to persuade me; she was there to once again set down what she *knew* to be true. Olwyn wrote:

Your letter of 3 December came to me—and I thought a few points listed below could be useful to your proposed article. I'm forwarding your letter to Ted.

I don't quite know what the peculiar biographing of Plath is an allegory for. Personally, after the ravages of the myth I am no longer astonished (as I once was) by—say—the Pasternak Soviet Writers' Union "trial," or the formation of any Nazi-type group that sees the whole of existence in its own patently cranky terms. People are monstrous, stupid, and dishonest. If there is a bandwagon, the most unexpected people are only too happy to close down eyes, ears, and brain and get on it. . . .

The myth was created by the following amalgam: Sylvia's own version of herself and her situation, and of other situations after the separation. This was dictated by her paranoid mechanism (or whatever was

wrong with her), perfected in small ways over the years. Toward the end, her remarks about others were little more than lies, designed to elicit maximum sympathy and approval toward herself. PLUS her mother's attitude throughout. Endlessly supportive of what she knew to be a frail craft during Sylvia's life, she continued this after her death: one must only see Sylvia's "best side." This sentimentalizing hypocrisy, forgivable in a mother, was largely supported by Ted Hughes, if only in silence, as he greatly pitied Mrs. Plath and the hammering she took after publication of *Bell Jar* and some of the poems. It's my belief that if Mrs. Plath had said, when Sylvia died, "She suffered from mental illness, but was a marvellous person and I loved her" the myth would never have happened. Unfortunately, Mrs. Plath was ashamed of the mental illness—it has never been made clear, for instance, just how very ill Sylvia was with her first breakdown. . . .

Then came the glowing memoirs—those of Al Alvarez, Elizabeth Compton (now Sigmund), and Clarissa Roche particularly. All had in common that their friendship with Plath had been slight. (Though she had real interest in Alvarez, they met only half a dozen times.) As no other of Plath's friends would talk to the flood of journalists, would-be biographers, etc., etc., these three—the ladies particularly—had the field to themselves, from Butscher's biography up to the present one. Roche and Sigmund now pronounce regally on anything to do with Plath as her great friends. . . .

Stevenson's is certainly the first biography worthy of the name. Linda Wagner-Martin's was much improved, though much thinned down, by my requiring her to substantiate the . . . rubbish she had in earlier drafts. Because she finally published when I was still awaiting a "final draft" there are new gobbets, as well as shadows from this earlier nonsense, still in her book. . . .

What has been amazingly lacking is any human feeling for the people who had the tragedy of Sylvia's death at first hand as part of their own lives—Aurelia, Ted, and her children. It's totally changed my entire attitude to people. An extraordinarily interesting experience, following it all, but finally horrifying and unforgetable.

If I was surprised by the length and vehemence of Olwyn's letter, I was not surprised by the fact of hearing from her rather than from Hughes. Of course, I thought. Over the years that Ted Hughes has been trying to escape from his narrativizing pursuers, his sister has done just the opposite. As literary agent of the Plath estate, a position she assumed in the mid-sixties and resigned from in 1991, Olwyn has had dealings with everyone who has wanted to write about Plath, presenting herself as a kind of Sphinx or Turandot before whom the various supplicants must appear—and invariably come to grief. She is also famous for her letters to editors and for

the comments she regularly makes to journalists following the appearance of new writings about Plath and Hughes; these, too, display her strange fierceness and discursiveness. Her two roles fit uneasily together: Sphinxes and Turandots don't usually write letters to editors or talk to journalists. They bar, they forbid, they slay; they don't volunteer. After three and a half years of acquaintance with Olwyn—of meetings, telephone conversations, and correspondence—I cannot say I know her much better than I did when she first appeared to me in her letter. But I have never seen anything in her of the egotism, narcissism, and ambition that usually characterize the person who welcomes journalistic notice in the belief that he can beat the odds and gain control of the narrative. Olwyn seems motivated purely by an instinct to protect her younger brother's interests and uphold the honor of the family, and she pursues this aim with reckless selflessness. Her frantic activity makes one think of a mother quail courageously flying into the face of a predator to divert him from the chicks scurrying to safety. The journalist whose talons are closing around her cannot but be stirred by the woman's fierce loyalty and love—and cannot help wondering about the emotions of the man for whom she

is sacrificing herself, as he observes it from his cover.

IN 1971, in *The New York Review of Books*, Elizabeth Hardwick wrote of Plath that "she has the rarity of being, in her work at least, never a 'nice person.'" Hardwick put her finger on the quality that so arrested readers of "Ariel" when it first came out (in England in 1965, and in America in 1966), and continues to arrest us today. Plath's not-niceness is the outstanding characteristic of the "Ariel" poems, it is what sets her apart from the other so-called confessional poets of the fifties and sixties, it is the note of the "true self" that Hughes celebrates. Her status as a feminist heroine has in large part derived from this tone. Women honor her for her courage to be unpleasant. "Every woman adores a Fascist," Plath wrote in "Daddy"—meaning a male Fascist. But women have adored Plath for the Fascist in her, for the "boot in the face" that, even as she writes of male oppression, she herself viciously administers to readers of both sexes. Though "The Bell Jar" hasn't the art of the late poems, its tone is still bracingly not-nice. (Had she lived, Plath might have developed into a first-rank novelist; "The Bell Jar" might have been to her mature fiction what "The Colossus" is to



"He offered me early retirement."



"I think I prefer not to have the cuffs show that much."

her mature poetry.) The novel is an indictment of the fifties in America. It chronicles the breakdown and suicide attempt and "recovery" of its heroine, Esther Greenwood, and is narrated by Esther in a voice that has all the disdain of the voice of "Ariel," if not its chilly beauty and authority. The book has a surface puerility, a deceptive accessibility: it reads like a girls' book. But it is a girls' book written by a woman who has been to hell and back and wants to revenge herself on her tormentors. It is a girls' book filled with poison, vomit, blood, and volts of electricity (the electrocution of the Rosenbergs and Esther's horrifyingly powerful shock treatments are mordantly linked), and peopled by creepy men and pathetic older women.

"The Bell Jar" is a fictionalized account of Plath's own breakdown and shock therapy and suicide attempt in 1953, and Plath did not want the originals of her unlovely characters—particularly her mother—to read the book. Esther's mother is rendered with deft mercilessness. "My mother took care never to tell me to do anything," Esther caustically observes. "She would only reason with me sweetly, like one intelligent mature person with another." Also

examined and found wanting in every respect are, among others, Olive Higgins Prouty, the author of "Stella Dallas," who was Plath's benefactor (she was the sponsor of Plath's freshman scholarship at Smith, paid for her hospitalization after her suicide attempt, and became a lifelong friend of Aurelia's); Plath's college boyfriend, Dick Norton; and his mother. Plath therefore published the book under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. It came out in England in January of 1963 under that name and then, after her suicide, under her own name. (Two American publishers had turned it down.) When "The Bell Jar" was finally scheduled for publication in America, in 1971, Aurelia Plath was beside herself. In a letter to the publisher she wrote:

Practically every character in *The Bell Jar* represents someone—often in caricature—whom Sylvia loved; each person had given freely of time, thought, affection, and, in one case, financial help during those agonizing six months of breakdown in 1953. . . . As this book stands by itself, it represents the basest ingratitude.

The shade of Plath must have read these words with a mocking and rather satisfied smile. Mrs. Plath giving freely of time is indistinguishable from Mrs.

Greenwood reasoning sweetly. However, Mrs. Plath didn't end matters there. In 1975, to make good her claim that the not-nice persona of "Ariel" and "The Bell Jar" was Plath's sick "false self," and that her healthy "real self" was a kindly, "service-oriented" good girl, she asked for and received permission from Ted Hughes, Plath's literary executor, to publish a book of Plath's letters to her written between 1950 and 1963. The idea was to show that Plath was not the hateful, hating ingrate, the changing of "Ariel" and "The Bell Jar," but a loving, obedient daughter. The shade's smile of satisfaction must have faded when the letters appeared, in a volume called "Letters Home." "Mother, *how could you?*" would be any daughter's anguished response to an act of treachery like the publication of these letters: letters sloppily written, effusive, regressive; letters written habitually, compulsively, sometimes more than one a day; letters sent in the secure knowledge that they were for a mother's uncritical eyes alone. It is one thing when some "publishing scoundrel" somehow gets hold of a cache of your most private and unpremeditated letters after your death and prints them, and another when your own mother hands you over to posterity in your stained bathrobe and unwashed face; it is quite beyond endurance, in fact. It seems simply never to have occurred to Mrs. Plath that the persona of "Ariel" and "The Bell Jar" was the persona by which Plath wished to be represented and remembered—that she wrote this way for publication because this was the way she wished to be perceived, and that the face she showed her mother was not the face she wished to show the reading public. One cannot blame the poor woman for her innocence. When a child commits suicide, the parents may be forgiven anything they do to dull their pain, even (or perhaps especially) acts of unconscious aggression.

The publication of "Letters Home" had a different effect from the one Mrs. Plath had intended, however. Instead of showing that Sylvia wasn't "like that," the letters caused the reader to consider for the first time the possibility that her sick relationship with her mother was the reason she *was* like that. Previously, the death of Plath's father, Otto (a German-born professor of entomology, who died when she was barely eight), had been

thought of as the shadow-event of her life, the wound from which she never recovered. But now it looked as if the key to Plath's tragedy might all along have lain buried in the mother-daughter relationship. What Plath, with an artist's indirection, had only suggested about its pathology (in such poems as "The Disquieting Muses" and "Medusa" as well as in "The Bell Jar") now leaped off the pages of "Letters Home." In the last line of "Medusa"—a poem in the form of a daughter's angry speech to a mother—Plath writes, with chilling double meaning, "There is nothing between us." The crushing too-closeness of Sylvia and her mother (and its concomitant terrifying alienation) is everywhere documented in "Letters Home." Critical commentary about the unnatural bond between mother and daughter (Harriet Rosenstein and Lynda Bundtzen are among the most distinguished contributors to this literature) could hardly have cheered Mrs. Plath. But something even more momentous than her painful miscalculation—her utter failure to convince the world of how wonderful everything was with Sylvia and between her and Sylvia—resulted from the publication of "Letters Home." This was the release into the world of a flood of information about Plath and the people in her life, most notably Ted Hughes—a flood that could be likened to an oil spill in the devastation it wrought among Plath's survivors, who to this day are like birds covered with black ooze. Before the publication of "Letters Home," the Plath legend was brief and contained, a taut, austere stage drama set in a few bleak, sparsely furnished rooms. Alvarez's artful memoir established its anxious tone and adumbrated its potential as a feminist parable. Now the legend opened out, to become a vast, sprawling movie-novel filmed on sets of the most consummate and particularized realism: period clothing, furniture, and kitchen appliances; real food; a cast of characters headed by a Doris Dayish Plath (a tall Doris Day who "wrote") and a Laurence Olivier-Heathcliffish Hughes. In exposing her daughter's letters to the world's scrutiny, Mrs. Plath not only violated Plath's writer's privacy but also handed Plath herself over to the world as an object to be familiarly passed from hand to hand. Now everyone could feel that he "knew" Plath—and, of course, Hughes as well.

Hughes had retained the right of final approval of the book, and he was criticized for its editing; it was felt that he had taken out too much, that there were too many ellipses. But in fact "Letters Home" is remarkable not for what it leaves out about Hughes but for what it leaves in.

Plath's hysterically ecstatic letters to her mother about Hughes when she first fell in love with him and her only slightly calmer ones during the good years of the marriage give us—even with the elisions—a remarkably close look at the man. Of course, it is Plath's vision of him that we receive—other people who knew Hughes at the time have suggested that her version is a reflection of her tendency toward exaggeration and excess—but it is one we cannot easily erase. With the instincts of the novelist she was trying to become, Plath drew Hughes's character for her mother with a few sure, bold, stylized strokes. He makes his first appearance in a letter of March 3, 1956:

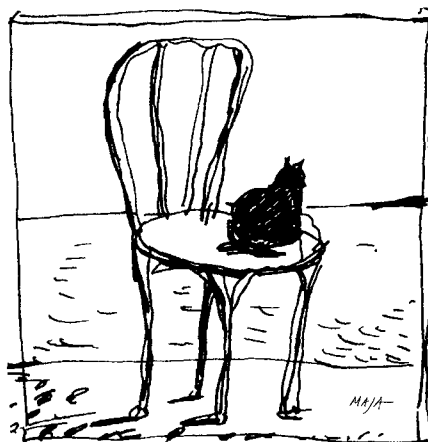
Met, by the way, a brilliant ex-Cambridge poet at the wild *St. Botolph's Review* party last week; will probably never see him again (he works for J. Arthur Rank in London), but wrote my best poem about him afterwards—the only man I've met yet here who'd be strong enough to be equal with—such is life.

On April 17th, she writes:

The most shattering thing is that in the last two months I have fallen terribly in love, which can only lead to great hurt. I met the strongest man in the world, ex-Cambridge, brilliant poet whose work I loved before I met him, a large, hulking, healthy Adam, half French half Irish, with a voice like the thunder of God—a singer, story-teller, lion and world-wanderer, a vagabond who will never stop.

April 19th:

I shall tell you now about something most miraculous and thundering and terri-



fying and wish you to think on it and share some of it. It is this man, this poet, this Ted Hughes. I have never known anything like it. For the first time in my life I can use *all* my knowing and laughing and force and writing to the hilt all the time, everything, and you should see him, hear him!

He has a health and hugeness . . . the more he writes poems, the more he writes poems. He knows all about the habits of animals and takes me amid cows and coots. I am writing poems, and they are better and stronger than anything I have ever done.

April 29th:

Ted is incredible, mother . . . wears always the same black sweater and corduroy jacket with pockets full of poems, fresh trout and horoscopes. . . . He stalked in the door yesterday with a packet of little pink shrimp and four fresh trout. I made a nectar of Shrimp Newburg with essence of butter, cream, sherry and cheese; had it on rice with the trout. It took us three hours to peel all the little tiny shrimp, and Ted just lay groaning by the hearth after the meal with utter delight, like a huge Goliath.

His humor is the salt of the earth.

May 3rd:

I feel that all my life, all my pain and work has been for this one thing. All the blood spilt, the words written, the people loved, have been a work to fit me for loving. . . . I see the power and voice in him that will shake the world alive.

Ted has written many virile, deep banging poems.

Plath and Hughes were married on June 16, 1956, and Plath continued to write to Mrs. Plath about the "rugged, kind, magnificent man, who has no scrap of false vanity or tendency to toady to inferior strategic officials," and whose mind is "magnificent, not hair-splitting or suavely politic." When Hughes took a job teaching at a boys' school, Plath wrote of her hulking Adam, "They must really admire him; he is such a strong, fascinating person, compared to the other sissy teachers they get," and five years later, when Plath had an appendectomy and Hughes came to the hospital bringing "huge rare steak sandwiches," Plath wrote, "He is an absolute angel. To see him come in at visiting hours, about twice as tall as all the little, stumpy people, with his handsome, kind, smiling face is the most beautiful sight in the world to me."

In Plath's journals, the representation of Hughes as an overgrown Adonis/Aryan superman is the same, although the voice of the journal writer is a different one, often sharper and darker than that of the letter-home writer. On Feb-

SUMMER IN THE CITY BY GARY PANTER

PARK SLOPE





KIDDIE rides are clanky, clunky, bright-colored, lurching, pint-size, metal-and-fibreglass mechanical horses, alligators, reindeer—and, more recently, attack helicopters—that for more than fifty summers have been loitering in front of neighborhood drugstores, delis, pizza parlors, and now

video stores and everything-is-ninety-nine-cents shops. As a boy in Brownsville, Texas, Gary Panter used to worry that the rides would be gone by the time he was grown, but they still flourish in Park Slope—his part of Brooklyn. For a quarter, small kids get a minute and a half of bucking and bouncing

and a well-known tune. The merchandising theory is that moms will have to stand still and stare into the shop-windows for ninety seconds, but for the under-fives they're a bite-size bit of carousel, or, as Panter says, they're like "stepping inside your own tiny cartoon."

—TONY HISS



"A fellow human being to see Mr. Driscoll."

ruary 26, 1956, Plath set down a now famous account of her first meeting with Hughes at "the wild *St. Botolph's Review* party" that she wistfully ("will probably never see him again") wrote about to her mother. In the journal Plath tells of drinking and talking too loud and dancing and getting drunk. Then:

That big, dark, hunky boy, the only one there huge enough for me, who had been hunching around over women, and whose name I had asked the minute I had come into the room, but no one told me, came over and was looking hard in my eyes and it was Ted Hughes.

Hughes takes Plath to a back room, and

bang the door was shut and he was sloshing brandy into a glass and I was sloshing it at the place where my mouth was when I last knew about it. . . .

And I was stamping and he was stamping on the floor, and then he kissed me bang smash on the mouth [omission]. . . . And when he kissed my neck I bit him long and hard on the cheek, and when we came out of the room, blood was running down his face. [Omission.] And I screamed in myself, thinking: oh, to give myself crashing, fighting, to you.

I quote the passage as it appears in the published "Journals." A fuller text—in which Hughes, along with kissing Plath,

rips off her red hairband and pockets her silver earrings—was subsequently published elsewhere and is held up as proof of Hughes's self-servingly suppressive editing. But even in its censored version the passage is extraordinarily intimate, and one can only wonder why Hughes permitted any part of it to be published. In fact, if he was so keen to preserve his privacy why did he sanction the publication of "Letters Home" and "The Journals" at all?

An unpublished letter that Hughes wrote to Mrs. Plath seven years after Sylvia Plath's death offers a possible answer. The letter is in the Plath archive in the Lilly Library, at Indiana University at Bloomington—a huge repository of letters by Plath and to her, as well as family correspondence written after her death. (Mrs. Plath sold this collection to the Lilly in 1977.) In the letter, dated March 24, 1970, Hughes tells Mrs. Plath of a house that he wants to buy on the North Coast of Devon—"an unbelievably beautiful place"—for which, however, he hasn't the money. He doesn't want to sell a house he bought recently in Yorkshire ("a first class investment"), nor does he want ("for senti-

mental as they say reasons") to sell Court Green, which he moved back into with the children after Plath's death (and where he lives now, with his second wife, Carol). "Therefore," he tells Mrs. Plath, "I am trying to cash all my other assets and one that comes up is *The Bell Jar*." He asks Mrs. Plath how she would "feel about U.S. publication of this now," adding that in a few years the book will "hardly be saleable," a mere "curiosity for students." Mrs. Plath, of course, hated the book, and she wrote Hughes a strong letter of protest: she does not want "The Bell Jar" published in America. But at the end of the letter, "like one intelligent mature person with another," she defers to Hughes. "As the right to publish is yours, so too must be the decision," she says, with lame primness. So in 1971 "The Bell Jar" was published in America. Mrs. Plath endured it, and presently she exacted her pound of flesh: she asked Hughes's permission to publish Plath's letters to her. Hughes could hardly refuse.

One of the unpleasant but necessary conditions imposed on anyone writing about Sylvia Plath is a hardening of the heart against Ted Hughes. In one way or another, for this reason or that, the writer must put aside pity and sympathy for Hughes, the feeling that the man is a victim and a martyr, and resist any impulse to withdraw from the field and not add further to Hughes's torment. A number of writers have, in fact, left unfinished manuscripts. In a letter to Andrew Motion, Linda Wagner-Martin's British editor, Hughes speaks of these fallen aspirants with a kind of bitter triumph:

[Wagner-Martin is] so insensitive that she's evidently escaped the usual effects of undertaking this particular job—i.e. mental breakdown, neurotic collapse, domestic catastrophe—which in the past have saved us from several travesties of this kind being completed.

Hughes's letter to Mrs. Plath about cashing in on "The Bell Jar" allowed me to see Hughes for the first time with the requisite coldness: he had evidently exchanged his right to privacy for a piece of real estate. For if he had not published "The Bell Jar" against Mrs. Plath's wishes she would surely not have felt impelled to publish "Letters Home," and Hughes, in his turn, might not have felt impelled to administer a corrective to her

corrective by publishing "The Journals."

In a letter that appeared in *The New York Review of Books* on September 30, 1976, written in response to a review of three books about Plath, Olwyn Hughes complains that the reviewer, Karl Miller, "treat[s] Sylvia Plath's family as though they are characters in some work of fiction." She says, further, "It is almost as though, writing about Sylvia, some of whose work seems to take cruel and poetically licensed aim at those nearest to her, journalists feel free to do the same." Of course they do. The freedom to be cruel is one of journalism's uncontested privileges, and the rendering of subjects as if they were characters in bad novels is one of its widely accepted conventions. In Mrs. Plath, Ted Hughes, and Olwyn Hughes journalism found, and continues to find, three exceptionally alluring targets for its sadism and reductionism.

When "Bitter Fame" appeared, and raised the stakes of the game, I decided to become a player. Like all the other players at the table, I have felt anxious and oppressed by the game. It is being played in a room so dark and gloomy that one has a hard time seeing one's hand; one is apt to make mistakes. The air in the room is bad; it is the same air that has been breathed there for many years. The windows are grimy and jammed shut. The old servant's hands shake as he brings watery drinks. Through a door one sees an open coffin surrounded by candles. A small old woman sits in a straight-backed chair reading a manual of stenography. A very tall man with graying hair, dressed in black, comes through the doorway, having to duck his head, and stands watching the players. The door to the street suddenly opens, and a tall woman bursts in. She whispers something into the tall man's ear; he shrugs and returns to the room with the coffin. She looks after him, then gives the card table a malevolent little shove, so that drinks spill and cards scatter, and leaves, slamming the door. I look at my cards and call the bet.

ON February 11, 1991, I sat eating lunch with Olwyn Hughes in an almost empty Indian restaurant in London's Camden Town. London itself had a hushed, emptied-out feeling. The Gulf War had begun a few weeks earlier; terrorism was feared, and travel had halted—my hotel was three-quarters

empty. The weather was contributing to the city's mutedness. A spell of snow and freezing weather, for which the nation was unprepared, had set in, a siege of cold like the one that England was undergoing at the time of Plath's death, which Alvarez unforgettably rendered in his memoir:

The snow began just after Christmas and would not let up. By New Year the whole country had ground to a halt. The trains froze on the tracks, the abandoned trucks froze on the roads. The power stations, overloaded by million upon pathetic million of hopeless electric fires, broke down continually; not that the fires mattered, since the electricians were mostly out on strike. Water pipes froze solid; for a bath you had to scheme and cajole those rare friends with centrally heated houses, who became rarer and less friendly as the weeks dragged on. Doing the dishes became a major operation. The gastric rumble of water in outdated plumbing was sweeter than the sound of mandolins. Weight for weight, plumbers were as expensive as smoked salmon and harder to find. The gas failed and Sunday roasts were raw. The lights failed and candles, of course, were unobtainable. Nerves failed and marriages crumbled. Finally, the heart failed. It seemed the cold would never end. Nag, nag, nag.

Now, twenty-eight years later, the English were still stubbornly clinging to their notion that severe winter weather comes so infrequently to their green and pleasant land that preparing for it is not worthwhile, and I was thus able to experience at first hand some of Plath's frustration and feeling of stuckness during the winter of her suicide. I had sat for hours in an unheated train—grounded at a local station because the doors had frozen shut—and observed my fellow-passengers, who sat docile and expressionless, incurious about their fate, in a kind of exaltation of uncomplaining discomfort. I had walked through the city covered with treacherous hard-frozen snow and recalled Plath's "humorous" essay "Snow Blitz," written shortly before her death, in which her American impatience with English passivity and its attendant moral superiority kept breaking through the surface tone of amused detachment.

"Sylvia died this month," I said to Olwyn in the Indian restaurant. "On which day was it?"

"It happens to be today," she said. "I realized it yesterday, when I was dating a letter to you. It's strange."

"The house on Fitzroy Road where

she died is near here, isn't it?" I said. "After lunch, would you walk over there with me?"

"Darling, I don't think I want to do that," Olwyn said. She lit a cigarette, and as I looked at her through the smoke I recalled an entry in "Letters Home," dated November 21, 1956, which gives Plath's first impression of her new sister-in-law:

Olwyn, Ted's sister, stopped by this weekend on her way from a stay at home to her job in Paris. She is 28 and very startlingly beautiful with amber-gold hair and eyes. I cooked a big roast beef dinner, with red wine and strawberries and cream. She reminds me of a changeling, somehow, who will never get old. She is, however, quite selfish and squanders money on herself continually in extravagances of clothes and cigarettes, while she still owes Ted 50 pounds. But in spite of this, I do like her.

Plath's sense of Olwyn as a fey creature who would never grow old was brilliantly prescient. Although Olwyn today "looks her age"—isn't one of those astonishingly young-looking older women the modern world is full of—neither does she look like the usual woman in her sixties. There is something of the schoolgirl about her, an atmosphere of daring and disobedience, a hint of bohemianism. The hair is still amber-gold; the face is handsome and cared for. At the same time, there is something forbidding and imposing about her. Like

Hughes (and Plath), she is large-boned and tall, and as she sat in the restaurant with her coat over her shoulders, in a hunched posture that unsettlingly fused willfulness and dejection, I thought of Dürer's

allegorical rendering of Melancholy. In person, as in her letters, Olwyn is magnificently indifferent to the question of what her interlocutor does or doesn't know about the outrages that writers about Plath have committed or will commit. She simply pours out anger at and contempt for the people she has had to deal with in her position as literary agent to the Plath estate. She is like the principal of a school or the warden of a prison: students or inmates come and go, while she remains. A rowdy new class of freshmen was about to arrive. Ronald Hayman and Paul Alexander were soon to publish their defiantly unauthorized biographies, and Jacqueline Rose was about to come out with a liter-



ary study that would impertinently challenge the editing of "The Journals" and "Letters Home." But Olwyn had by no means forgotten the misdemeanors of the alumni, or those of the recently matriculated Anne Stevenson. I had only to touch the sore spot to send her into an aria of derision whose first notes I had heard a few months earlier, and which I would continue to hear throughout our acquaintance. "Let's face it, Anne was a mistake," she had said at our first meeting. "I regret I didn't get somebody brighter, somebody like Hilary Spurling. Sylvia was an intellectual—Anne is not. I had to nanny her along. She wasted a year of my life." And (in a later recital): "Anne is a good little poet. She's a little literary lady. She did some good things; there are one or two chapters that are quite nice. She's a passionate little writer. But she doesn't have a lively hungry mind. I hadn't realized that. I was misled by her sober demeanor and her nice tweeds and the fact that she taught. She never quite grasped Sylvia's nature. She got her wrong. She was always imagining she was this sweet emotional girl. But she wasn't." Now, in the Indian restaurant, Olwyn returned to the theme. "Anne left all the interesting things out and put the dull things in," she said. "She had to put her stamp on everything. She kept one dancing about with her silly little notes. I was exasperated by this rubbish. I wanted the facts to be on

record. I didn't know she would write her little personal musings on Sylvia Plath. Biography isn't a poem, it isn't a novel, it's a document."

"Why didn't you write your own book?" I asked.

"I'm not a writer. And, as Ted's sister, I wouldn't have been believed."

"'Bitter Fame' isn't believed, either," I said. "If you had written a sister's frank account, it would have been read as such. People would have known where they stood. This way, they are suspicious. They feel something is being hidden from them and put over on them."

"Yes, people can't bear to think that there's something they can't see. I've been sent a manuscript by an awful woman, a Jacqueline Rose. It's another attack on Ted. It builds its theory on Ted's cutting things out of Sylvia's journals. People have this idea that Ted watches over everything. Ted is a very sweet-natured man. A very nice guy. I've written twenty pages of notes on Rose's book—I'll send them to you. Do you know this woman?"

"I am going to meet her in a few days." I had heard of Jacqueline Rose's project—it is now the book "The Haunting of Sylvia Plath"—and a couple of months earlier I had spoken with her on the telephone about it and about the prospect of meeting with her when I came to England. The conversation had been brief. Rose told me that she had

delivered her manuscript to her publisher, Virago, and was waiting to find out how a "situation" that had developed between Virago and the Plath estate would come out. If things went well—if the difficulties were ironed out and the book went uneventfully to press—she would have nothing to speak to a journalist about. If things did not go well, she would have a great deal to talk about. Evidently, things had not gone well: I had an appointment to meet Rose.

The waiter started clearing the table, and Olwyn reached into her handbag and gave me a sheet of paper. It was the letter to me that she had mentioned dating the previous day; she had decided to hand it to me rather than mail it. Most of it consisted of three passages written by relatives of three famous dead writers—Virginia Woolf, John Middleton Murry, and Sylvia Plath—expressing anger and bitterness toward biographers and/or critics. The relatives were Quentin Bell, writing to Olwyn; Katherine Middleton Murry (J.M.M.'s daughter), writing in the *Independent*; and Ted Hughes writing to Jacqueline Rose. The Hughes passage was the one that interested me most. It read:

Critics established the right to say whatever they pleased about the dead. It is an absolute power, and the corruption that comes with it, very often, is an atrophy of the moral imagination. They move onto the living because they can no longer feel the difference between the living and the dead. They extend over the living that licence to say whatever they please, to ransack their psyche and reinvent them however they please. They stand in front of classes and present this performance as exemplary civilised activity—this utter insensitivity towards other living human beings. Students see the easy power and are enthralled, and begin to outdo their teachers. For a person to be corrupted in that way is to be genuinely corrupted.

"That's a remarkable piece of writing," I said, putting the letter in my handbag.

Olwyn lit another cigarette, and I ventured a question to which I felt I already knew the answer. "What was it like to know Sylvia?"

She hesitated for a moment and then said, "There was no girl-to-girl between us. She was very absorbed in Ted; she wasn't interested in me."



"Everybody comfortable? Got what they want? Know their place?"

"Do you feel that she came between you and your brother?"

"That's rubbish," Olwyn said. "That's cultish nonsense. I was full of my own life in those days."

If all our relationships are founded on imagination as much as reality, circumstances dictated that Olwyn's relationship to Plath be more interior than most. Because Olwyn lived and worked in Paris during the six years of the Plath-Hughes marriage (two of them spent in America and four in England), she and Plath were brought together, all told, only five or six times. It could be fairly said that Olwyn's "real" relationship with Plath began only after Plath's death, when Olwyn left her job in Paris to live at Court Green with Hughes and help him take care of the motherless children. During Plath's lifetime, Olwyn evidently thought of Plath—when she thought of her at all—as the woman she wished her brother had not married. Support for this reading of Olwyn's mind lies in three scenes recounted in "Bitter Fame." Each of them shows something unpleasant happening between the sisters-in-law, and each of them was retailed to Anne Stevenson by Olwyn to illustrate flaws in Plath's character. In each case, the reader knows that he is hearing only one side of a quarrel, and, as with the Dido Merwin memoir, is arrested by the innocence of the narrator's belief in her power of persuasion. Reporting ill of another is one of the most difficult and delicate of rhetorical operations; to be persuasive, to leave the reader with an impression of X's badness and of one's own disinterestedness and goodness, requires great skill. One cannot just blurt out—as Dido and Olwyn blurt out—how awful X is. All this achieves is to arouse the reader's sympathy for X.

The most unpleasant of the unpleasant scenes recounted in "Bitter Fame" took place in Yorkshire, in the home of Ted and Olwyn's parents during the Christmas holidays of 1960:

As far as Olwyn can recall [Anne Stevenson writes], it began with a remark she made in response to some rather "malicious" account of Sylvia's on the behavior of some-



"If it's true they're going to start sending down priests, we'll have to change all the software."

one Sylvia knew but Olwyn didn't. Olwyn said, "I say, you're awfully critical, aren't you?"—ignoring for once the unwritten rule that one just did *not* criticize Sylvia in any way. The reaction was immediate. Sylvia glared accusingly with a half-terrified, half-furious look and drew Ted into the room, having whispered Olwyn's remark to him. Olwyn, losing her temper, asked Sylvia why she didn't behave more normally, why she was so rude, why she so often showed little consideration for others. To these questions Sylvia made no reply but kept up her unnerving stare. Olwyn, who immediately regretted she'd said a word, remembers thinking, "Why doesn't she *say* something?"

Olwyn ended the confrontation with relief by stroking Frieda's silky hair (the baby was sitting on her knee throughout) and saying, "But we shouldn't talk like this over her sweet head." Frieda was ready for bed, and Sylvia silently seized her and went upstairs, not to reappear. Olwyn went to bed later, feeling very contrite. She was awakened at dawn by the departure of her brother and his family.

One notices that it is Plath's *silence* that incenses Olwyn. We remember Hughes's association of authenticity—"the real self"—with dumbness. But here dumbness is perceived (as Lear perceives it in Cordelia) as aggression. Olwyn verbally attacks Plath, but Olwyn's words are only words; it is Plath's (Medusan) speechlessness that is the deadly, pun-

ishing weapon. In a letter Olwyn wrote to me a year and a half ago she returned to this incident, underscoring the threatening character of Plath's silence:

It was, I guess, an exasperated telling off. She never said a word, but mutely glared. It is the only tiff I have ever had in my life where the other person hadn't a word to say for themselves. Looking back, it seems quite aggressive of her to have left at dawn the next day. Taking away from me the opportunity to "make it up," which I intended to do, and putting me firmly in the wrong.

Below the surface of Olwyn's story of the Yorkshire confrontation, with its anxious score-settling atmosphere, lie deep wounds, and one of them is surely the wound from which survivors of suicides never recover. Plath, as we know, "left at dawn" on another day, in 1963. The suicide "goes away," and the survivors are forever in the wrong. They are like the damned, who can never make amends, who have no prospect of grace. Olwyn's "Why doesn't she *say* something?" expresses the anguish and anger of those who have been left without a word in a lake of fire.

Of course, Plath did "say something." On January 1, 1961, she wrote to her mother about the incident, quoting the

unpleasant things Olwyn had said about her, and making some unpleasant observations of her own about the relationship between Olwyn and Ted, even, outrageously, suggesting incest. The letter is mentioned in "Bitter Fame" ("Sylvia complained in characteristically extreme language about the scene with Olwyn"), but it is not quoted. Anne Stevenson had intended to quote it—passages from it appear in a draft of her book—but Olwyn couldn't bear to hear herself spoken of in this way, and insisted that the passages be removed, reproaching Anne, in a letter of December 12, 1987, for her "unaffectionate wish to slander me in Plath's words." Stevenson felt that the quotation spoke for itself—that it was so intemperate and out of control that it would actually create sympathy for Olwyn, as Dido Merwin's intemperate lashings out at Plath only created sympathy for her victim. But Olwyn couldn't see this. Plath had refused to engage with Olwyn during her life, and now, in death, was compounding the injury by talking about her behind her back. Olwyn, understandably, found this intolerable.

Olwyn's recollection of this unpleasant scene and of two similar scenes reads like a single recurrent dream of infantile diminishment. In each, Plath is rendered as a silent, powerful, uncanny antagonist, whose aggression leaves Olwyn stunned and cowed and baffled. Freud speaks in one of his technical papers of how the analytic patient's secrets leak out from every pore without his knowledge. The warily silent Hughes has protected his secrets better than his sister has: no one can use his words against him. But everyone can—and does—speculate about his motives. "They can no longer feel the difference between the living and the dead," he complains about the biographers and critics and journalists who write about him and his family when writing about Plath. "They extend over the living that licence to say whatever they please." Milan Kundera, in his novel "Immortality," has a passage of commiseration for the dead. Under the ground, they are "even lower than the old," he writes. "The old are still accorded human rights. The dead, however, lose all rights from the very first second of death. No law protects them any longer from slander, their privacy

has ceased to be private; not even the letters written to them by their loved ones, not even the family album left to them by their mothers, nothing, nothing belongs to them any longer." What Hughes is protesting is being treated as if he were dead. The issue between the Hugheses and the public hostile to them is whether or not the Hugheses are dead. They have compromised their claim to being alive by their financial gains from the dead poet's literary remains. They have eaten the pomegranate seeds that tie them to the underworld. Plath's advocates have watched with malicious satisfaction as the Hugheses vainly struggle to assert their rights as live people. Hughes's acceptance of the odd job of Poet Laureate has only further worsened his prospects as a live person. The Poet Laureate is no longer quite mortal. He has ascended to the pantheon of the belauded dead. He has also descended into the cesspool from which sensationalist journalism draws its lurid narratives about celebrities. "SECRET LIFE OF THE POET LAUREATE—'TED CANNOT HIDE FOREVER'" was the headline of a particularly low specimen in the *Mail on Sunday*, on February 1, 1987. But a paradox hedges the struggle between the Plath advocates and the Hugheses. The advocates, whom Olwyn calls "libbers," because many of them are feminists, are, in this struggle, not representatives of women's liberation so much as representatives of a kind of dead lib. They want to restore to Plath the rights she lost when she died. They want to wrest from Hughes the power over her literary remains which he acquired when she died intestate. They want to remove the gag of censorship from her journals and letters. But by so doing, by restoring Plath to the status of the living, they simply achieve a substitution: they send the Hugheses and Mrs.

Plath down to take Plath's place among the rightless dead.

OLWYN and I left the dark, warm restaurant for the bitterly cold street. Olwyn began to tell me how to get to Plath's house on Fitzroy Road, but the directions were complicated, and when she learned that I had no street guide with me she said, "Oh, all right—I'll walk with you. You'd never find it."

We walked what seemed like a long way, having to pick our path slowly through the hardened snow. "It's strange going to Sylvia's house on the anniversary of her death," Olwyn said. We had reached the pleasant neighborhood of Primrose Hill and had crossed a square that Olwyn identified as Chalcot Square, where Plath and Hughes had lived between February of 1960 and the summer of 1961. She pointed out a handsome five-story row house where they had had a tiny apartment on the fourth floor. The apartment had been found by Dido Merwin; she and William Merwin, who lived in the neighborhood, had become the helpful—probably too helpful—older friends of Hughes and Plath. In her memoir Dido writes of the "literary string-pullings and introductions" that William performed on Ted's behalf, and of her own efforts in "fixing up the very pregnant Sylvia with the right National Health Service doctor." She then reports Plath's ingratitude, her "summary and unexpectedly graceless rejection" of Dido's suggestion that she buy furniture and appliances for the flat from local second-hand shops. (The Merwins had already lent Plath and Hughes furniture from their attic.) It was, Dido writes, "like a warning shot across the bows: things, it seemed, were not going to be such congenial plain sailing as I had supposed. But if the Hugheses elected to go splurging on a posh cooker, refrigerator, and bed, what the hell? Never mind if it made no sense to a couple of flea-marketeers like Bill and me. It would have made complete sense, of course, had we any inkling of the besetting insecurity that was the root cause of Sylvia's need for morale-boosting toys." The American reader can only stare at the puritanism that conceives of the desire for a decent bed and a new stove as decadent and pathological.

The passage affords another glimpse of Plath's alienation in England. Interestingly, this was never a theme for

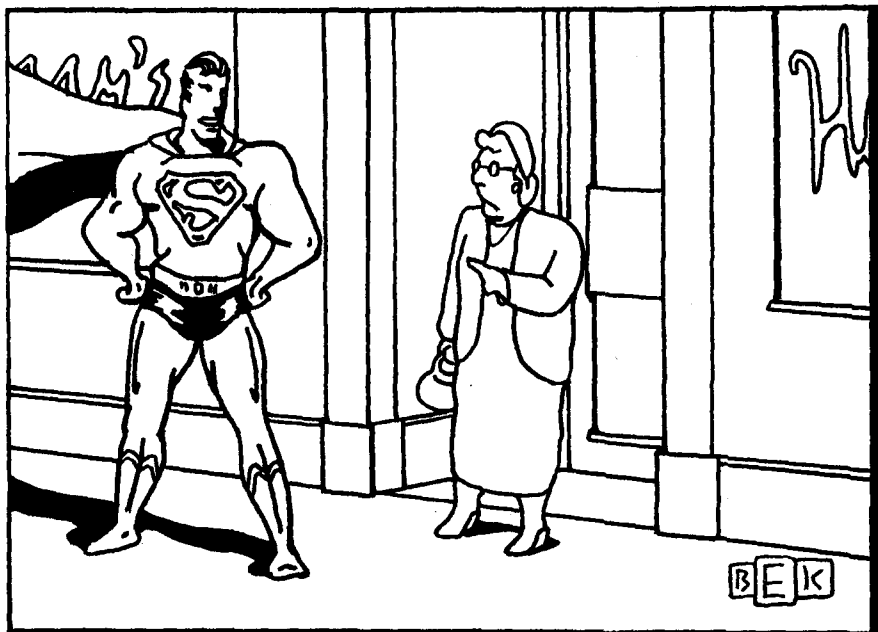


Plath. She occasionally permitted herself a few words to her mother or to American friends about the uncleanliness and dismalness of English kitchens and bathrooms, but she seemed determined to accept the discomforts of her adopted country with good grace. After the separation from Hughes, there was nothing keeping her in England, but she never considered returning to America. In harsh England Plath had found a refuge from (as she called it in "The Bell Jar") "the motherly breath of the suburbs" of Eisenhower America. Here her wicked wit could flourish and her writing could break out of the caul of obedient mannerism that encased its early examples. The emergence of the "true self" as a writer was a shedding of Plath's American identity along with the other "false" identities she cast off. She did not write—and could not have written—"The Bell Jar" or "Ariel" in her native Massachusetts. The pitiless voice of the "Ariel" poet was a voice that had rid itself of its American accent.

When Plath arrived in England on a Fulbright to Cambridge, in the fall of 1955, the accent was still strong. A fellow American graduate student, Jane Baltzell Kopp, recalls Plath's conspicuous "Americanisms" with the air of a sibling who has herself learned how to appear in public and not trot out the family's tacky little habits. She singles out for special scorn Plath's "full set" of white-and-gold Samsonite luggage, which (Kopp reports) inspired "much amazement, incredulity, and humor among the British" when they saw her with it on drab railway platforms. Kopp's memoir appears in "Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work," an anthology of writings about Plath, edited by Edward Butscher, and published in 1977. Another contributor, the late Dorothea Krook, who was Plath's favorite teacher at Cambridge, and whose memoir is tenderly sympathetic, also, however, points out Plath's exoticism as a girl who was "always neat and fresh, wearing charming, girlish clothes, the kind of clothes that made you look at the girl, not the garments; hair down to the shoulders still, but ever so neatly brushed and combed, and held back in place by a broad bandeau on the crown. . . . This charming American neatness and freshness is what I chiefly recall about her physical person." The photographs of

DOG DAYS





"Why, yes, I do have buns of steel."

Plath in the various biographies and in "Letters Home" and "The Journals" show her as Krook described her. With her shining blond hair and her soft, rounded face, she evokes the soap and deodorant advertisements of the nineteen-forties and fifties, in which the words "dainty" and "fresh" never failed to appear. Contrast this picture with Alvarez's description of Plath on the night of his last meeting with her, on Christmas Eve, 1962, two months before her death. Plath is no longer blond (the earlier blondness had been artificial) and no longer conspicuously clean. Alvarez writes:

Her hair, which she usually wore in a tight, schoolmistressy bun, was loose. It hung straight to her waist like a tent, giving her pale face and gaunt figure a curiously desolate, rapt air, like a priestess emptied out by the rites of her cult. When she walked in front of me down the hall passage and up the stairs to her apartment—she had the top two floors of the house—her hair gave off a strong smell, sharp as an animal's.

Another index to the transformation may be found in two recordings of poetry readings that Plath made—one in Massachusetts in 1958, and the other in London in late 1962, for the BBC. In the Massachusetts recording, she reads in a young, slightly declamatory voice, with a Boston accent. The reading is pleasant, a little dull. The BBC recording is extraordinary; no one who hears it can fail to be jolted by it. Elizabeth Hardwick has written a defini-

tive description of this rare document:

I have never before learned anything from a poetry reading, unless the clothes, the beard, the girls, the poor or good condition of the poet can be considered a kind of knowledge. But I was taken aback by Sylvia Plath's reading. It was not anything like I could have imagined. Not a trace of the modest, retreating, humorous Worcester, Massachusetts, of Elizabeth Bishop; nothing of the swallowed plain Pennsylvania of Marianne Moore. Instead these bitter poems—"Daddy," "Lady Lazarus," "The Applicant," "Fever 103"—were "beautifully" read, projected in full-throated, plump, diction-perfect, Englishy, mesmerizing cadences, all round and rapid, and paced and spaced. Poor recessive Massachusetts had been erased. "I have done it again!" Clearly, perfectly, staring you down. She seemed to be standing at a banquet like Timon, crying, "Uncover, dogs, and lap!"

And yet when we think of Plath's death at dawn in an indifferent London it is homely Massachusetts that somehow comes back into view. The idea of death far away from home has a special pathos; embedded in it is the fantasy that the foreign place contributed to the death, perhaps was even the cause of it. Foreignness is threatening, dangerous: if only he or she had stayed home and not drunk that water, not taken that ancient bus over the pass, never ventured into that evil café. Again, it is Alvarez's memoir that sets the "if only" terms of the narrative of Plath's suicide. Plath's first suicide attempt, in 1953, took place literally at home, in the crawl space under the porch of her mother's house, and she survived it. Far

away from home, she died. Alvarez believed that Plath had not meant to die, that her death "came carelessly, by mistake and too soon," and was "a cry for help" which fatally misfired." A deadly concatenation of events—for which the relentless cold, the frozen pipes, the lack of a phone, the children's and Plath's viral infections were a kind of rancorous background music—plucked her from a world she had not intended to leave. She left it abjectly. As Alvarez remembered her from his last visit to her flat and imagined her on the eve of her death, she was a pathetic, diminished figure.

"Bitter Fame" further sharpens the contrast between the large, powerful panzer-woman of "Ariel," who eats "men like air" and "adores a Fascist," and the little defeated American girl in the chilly white, sparsely furnished flat, who places bread and milk at her children's bedsides and then turns on the gas taps and lays her head in the oven on a folded cloth she has placed there. The folded cloth is a new detail, as is a letter from Plath's doctor, John Horder, writing of Plath's dire mental condition in the weeks before her death; and so is the testimony of Jillian Becker, a new English friend, who took Plath and her children into her house on her final weekend and tried to keep her from returning to Fitzroy Road. Paradoxically, the vividness with which "Bitter Fame" evokes the pathos and horror of Plath's death only contributed to the outrage that its publication provoked—only strengthened the narrative of a Plath mistreated in death by a hostile sister-in-law, as she had been mistreated in life by a faithless husband. "There she still is, a fragile, lovable creature, in danger of being crushed," Ronald Hayman, one of the most persistent of the Hugheses' harriers, wrote of Plath in the *Independent* on April 19, 1989. Ludicrous as this description of the author of "Ariel" and "The Bell Jar" is, it reflects a popular fantasy about Plath: it expresses the public's need to see Plath as victim, its desire to impose a Jamesian structure of American innocence versus European corruption (Plath as Isabel Archer, let us say, and Hughes and Olwyn as Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle) on the struggle between the vivid dead girl and the ghostly English relations.

As I write the word "ghostly," I feel closer to the center of the mystery of why the weight of public opinion has fallen so squarely on the Plath side and

against the Hugheses—why the dead have been chosen over the living. We choose the dead because of our tie to them, our identification with them. Their helplessness, passivity, vulnerability is our own. We all yearn toward the state of inanition, the condition of harmlessness, where we are perforce lovable and fragile. It is only by a great effort that we rouse ourselves to act, to fight, to struggle, to be heard above the wind, to crush flowers as we walk. To behave like *live people*. The contest between Plath and Hughes invokes the contest between the two principles that hedge human existence. In his poem "Sheep" Ted Hughes writes of a lamb that inexplicably died soon after birth:

It was not
That he could not thrive, he was born
With everything but the will—
That can be deformed, just like a limb.
Death was more interesting to him.
Life could not get his attention.

Life, of course, never gets anyone's entire attention. Death always remains interesting, pulls us, draws us. As sleep is necessary to our physiology, so depression seems necessary to our psychic economy. In some secret way, Thanatos nourishes Eros as well as opposes it. The two principles work in covert concert; though in most of us Eros dominates, in none of us is Thanatos completely subdued. However—and this is the paradox of suicide—to *take* one's life is to behave in a more active, assertive, "erotic" way than to helplessly watch as one's life is *taken away* from one by inevitable mortality. Suicide thus engages with both the death-hating and the death-loving parts of us: on some level, perhaps, we may envy the suicide even as we pity him. It has frequently been asked whether the poetry of Plath would have so aroused the attention of the world if Plath had not killed herself. I would agree with those who say no. The death-ridden poems move us and electrify us because of our knowledge of what happened. Alvarez has observed that the late poems read as if they were written posthumously, but they do so only because a death actually took place. "When I am talking about the weather / I know what I am talking about," Kurt Schwitters writes in a Dada poem (which I have quoted in its entirety). When Plath is talking about the death wish, she knows what she is talking about. In 1966, Anne Sexton, who committed suicide eleven years after Plath, wrote a poem addressed to

Plath entitled "Wanting to Die," in which these startlingly informative lines appear:

But suicides have a special language.
Like carpenters they want to know *which tools*.
They never ask *why build*.

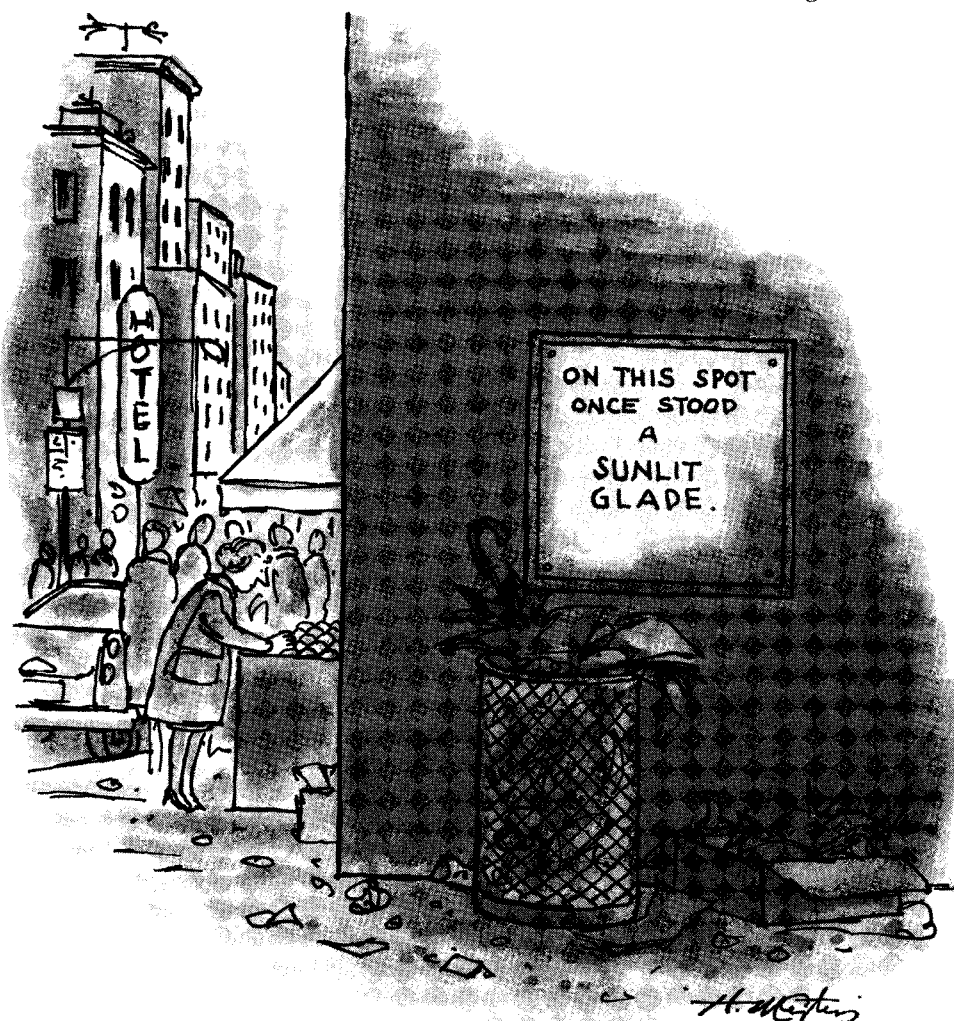
When, in the opening of "Lady Lazarus," Plath triumphantly exclaims, "I have done it again," and, later in the poem, writes,

Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.
I do it so it feels like hell.
I do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I've a call,

we can only share her elation. We know we are in the presence of a master builder.

OLWYN and I finally reached the house on Fitzroy Road where Plath killed herself. I recognized it immediately—it is an obligatory photographic subject of the Plath biographies, and its oval blue ceramic plaque reading "William Butler Yeats, 1865-1939, Irish poet and dramatist, lived here" is a compulsively mentioned (and yet oddly irrelevant) detail. No. 23 was part of a row of

three-story brick houses, with white trim around the windows and white clapboard at the basement and first-floor levels. Plath had rented the second-and-third-floor duplex, and lived there a bare two months, alone with her children. "Ted had been told late in September to leave Court Green. Early in October he came to collect his things," Stevenson laconically writes in "Bitter Fame," and two months later Plath moved to London with the children. The period of the breakup of the Plath-Hughes marriage is the radioactive center of the Plath biographical enterprise. Here is lodged the precious ore that the biographers struggle to wrest from the Hugheses. If the journals of this period, which Hughes destroyed or lost, are out of their reach, there remain the crazed letters that Plath wrote to her mother and to friends in her misery and jealousy and fury over Hughes's faithlessness. There is also the testimony of two friends, Elizabeth Sigmund and Clarissa Roche, who were confidantes of Plath's during her time of Medean trouble. They have come forward as defenders of the "fragile, lov-



able" Plath against the heartless Hughes. Each has published a memoir, and both have incurred the Hugheses' undying enmity and contempt for purveying lurid stories to grateful biographers and journalists. Sigmund, who lived in North Devon and saw more of Plath than Roche did, has contributed a famous set piece:

Then suddenly, late one evening, Sylvia arrived with Nick in his carry cot, and the change in her was appalling. She kept saying, "My milk has dried up, I can't feed Nick. My milk has gone."

At last she told me that Ted was in love with another woman, that she knew Assia and was terrified of her. She wept and wept and held onto my hands, saying, "Help me!"

What could I do? I have never felt so inadequate in my life. She claimed, "Ted lies to me, he lies all the time; he has become a little man." But the most frightening thing she said was, "When you give someone your whole heart and he doesn't want it, you cannot take it back. It's gone forever."

It was at Alvarez's suggestion that Sigmund wrote her memoir, which was published in *The New Review*, then edited by Alvarez's friend Ian Hamilton. It was republished (in a slightly different

version) in Butscher's anthology. Roche (whose memoir also appears in Butscher's book) recalls a similarly distraught Plath during a visit to Court Green in November, 1962: "The strong, passionate, sensitive Heathcliff had turned round and now appeared to [Plath] as a massive, crude, oafish peasant, who could not protect her from herself nor from the consequences of having grasped at womanhood. She cursed and mocked him for his weakness, and she called him a traitor."

There is no reason to doubt the bare truth of these reminiscences. As we know from the crazed letters, Plath said all kinds of things about Hughes in those days. And, as we all know from our own brushes with sexual jealousy, being crazed is the chief symptom of the malady. But what few of us have experienced during the progress of the illness is a surge of creativity, empowering us to do work that surpasses everything we have done before, work that seems to be doing itself. It was in a brief two months in the autumn of 1962, when Hughes

had left Devon, and Plath, unable to eat or sleep, was running actual high fevers as well as figurative ones of jealous rage and bathetic self-pity, that she wrote the majority of the "Ariel" poems. She was taking sleeping pills, and when they wore off, at about five in the morning, she would get up and write until the children awoke. In a letter to her friend the poet Ruth Fainlight (which begins with the obligatory abuse of Hughes) Plath wrote, "When I was 'happy' domestically I felt a gag in my throat. Now that my domestic life, until I get a permanent live-in girl, is chaos, I am living like a Spartan, writing through huge fevers and producing free stuff I had locked in me for years. I feel astounded and very lucky. I kept telling myself I was the sort that could only write when peaceful at heart, but that is not so, the muse has come to live here, now Ted has gone." To her mother, Plath wrote (in a letter in which she also said, "I hate and despise him so I can hardly speak"), "I am a genius of a writer; I have it in me. I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name." In late October, Plath began to look for an apartment in London—this was the period of her friendship with Alvarez—and on November 7th she wrote ecstatically to her mother:

I am writing from London, so happy I can hardly speak. I *think* I have found a place. . . . By an absolute *fluke* I walked by the street and the house (with Primrose Hill at the end) where I've always wanted to live. The house had builders in it and a sign, "Flats to Let"; I flew upstairs. *Just* right (unfurnished), on two floors, with three bedrooms upstairs, lounge, kitchen and bath downstairs and a balcony garden! Flew to the agents—hundreds of people ahead of me, I thought, as always. It seems I have a *chance*! And guess what, it is *W. B. Yeats' house*—with a blue plaque over the door, saying he lived there! And in the district of my old doctors and in the street [where] I would want to *buy* a house if I ever had a smash-hit novel.

This was the house that Olwyn and I now stood before. It had an air of prosperity and well-being. I had expected something less ample and nicely tended; Alvarez's memoir had prepared me for something pinched and melancholy. It is a commonplace of visits to places where something bad happened that no trace of it remains; the visitor is struck by the absence of what he has come to "see." Claude Lanzmann begins his film "Shoah" with a view of beautiful green countryside. He and a survivor of the Chelmno Nazi death camp are seen strolling on



Gregor Samsa III, who doesn't go out much, calls in a large order to the shopping channel.

the camp's site, now a poetic meadow beside a stream. In an ordinary voice, as Lanzmann questions him in an equally ordinary voice, the survivor tells of horrors that defy belief. The film is poised on the tension between time and history. Time heals all wounds, smooths, cleanses, obliterates; history keeps the wound open, picks at it, makes it raw and bleeding. In his film, Lanzmann makes the point over and over again. In Tel Aviv, he interviews a barber who survived Treblinka. The barber is cutting a customer's hair. Business as usual. As Lanzmann presses him for more specific details about the camp, the barber, now in tears, can't go on. "You must go on," Lanzmann sternly tells him. "You have to." The barber resolutely picks up his scissors and resumes his extraordinary oxymoronic performance of forgetting the past (cutting hair, cutting the connection to Treblinka) and remembering it (obeying Lanzmann's command to speak, saying the unsayable).

Imaginative literature is produced under the pressure of an inner interrogation like Lanzmann's. Poets and novelists and playwrights make themselves, against terrible resistances, give over what the rest of us keep safely locked within our hearts. Ted Hughes, in his introduction to a collection of Plath's short prose writings called "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams," writes of the "strange conflict between what was expected of her and what finally was exacted." What was expected of Plath was the obedient A student's genteel achievements of the nineteen-fifties; what was exacted was the dire poetry of "Ariel." In "Daddy" Plath writes:

I thought every German was you.
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

"Daddy" has had a mixed reception. There are critics who condemn Plath for appropriating the Holocaust for private purposes. "Whatever her father did to her, it could not have been what the Germans did to the Jews," Leon Wieseltier writes in *The New York Review of Books* (1976). "The metaphor is inappropriate. . . . Familiarity with the hellish subject must be earned, not presupposed." The late Irving Howe, in his book "The Critical Point" (1973), writes, "There is

something monstrous, utterly disproportionate, when tangled emotions about one's father are deliberately compared with the historical fate of the European Jews; something sad, if the comparison is made spontaneously." Seamus Heaney writes in his book "The Government of the Tongue" (1989), "A poem like 'Daddy,' however brilliant a tour de force it can be acknowledged to be, and however its violence and vindictiveness can be understood or excused in light of the poet's parental and marital relations, remains, nevertheless, so entangled in biographical circumstances, and rampages so permissively in the history of other people's sorrows that it simply overdraws its rights to our sympathy." On the other side, George Steiner honors Plath for her "act of identification, of total communion with those tortured and massacred." In his essay "Dying Is an Art" (1965) Steiner writes of her as "one of a number of young contemporary poets, novelists, and playwrights, themselves in no way implicated in the actual Holocaust, who have done most to counter the general inclination to forget the death camps." He calls "Daddy" "one of the very few poems I know of in any language to come near the last horror." And yet, after saying this, after calling "Daddy" the "Guernica" of modern poetry, Steiner is troubled. Something doesn't sit right with him. "Are these final poems entirely legitimate?" he asks, and then, in a turnaround—one that Howe pounces on and sees as "devastating to his early comparison with 'Guernica'"—asks, "In what sense does anyone, himself uninvolved and long after the event, commit a subtle larceny when he invokes the echoes and trappings of Auschwitz and appropriates an enormity of ready emotion to his own private design?" Three years later, writing of "Daddy" in the *Cambridge Review*, Steiner is still fretting about the question: "What extra territorial right had Sylvia Plath—she was a child, plump and golden in America, when the trains actually went—to draw on the reserves of animate horror in the ash and the children's shoes? . . . Do any of us have license to locate our personal disasters, raw as these may be, in Auschwitz?"

Steiner's ambivalence, his "yes, but" verdict on "Daddy," is a characteristic response to Plath's work and to her persona. We praise her (those of us who do not condemn or dismiss her), but then we

draw back. We retract some of our praise. Like Steiner, we're not sure where we stand with her. "Why doesn't she say something?" Olwyn asked. Like the life, the work is full of threatening silences. It is beautiful and severe and very cold. It is surrealistic, with surrealism's menace and refusal to explain itself. We stand before the "Ariel" poems as Olwyn stood before the stone-faced Sylvia. We feel humbled and rebuked, as if we were the "little, stumpy people" Plath saw in the hospital or the herbivores she writes of in her poem "Mystic," "whose hopes are so low they are comfortable." To speak of Plath's overdrawing her right to our sympathy isn't accurate. Plath never asks for our sympathy; she would not stoop to it. The voice of the "true self" is notable for its high notes of disdain—and its profound melancholy. The "tortured and massacred" are never far from Plath's thoughts. (She is reported to have said to the Scottish poet George MacBeth, "I see you have a concentration camp in your mind, too.") To say that Plath did not earn her right to invoke the names of Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen is off the mark. It is we who stand accused, who fall short, who have not accepted the wager of imagining the unimaginable, of cracking Plath's code of atrocity.

In "The Bell Jar" Plath conveys what it is like to go mad. In the "Ariel" poems she gives us what could be called the waste products of her madness. The connection that art draws between individual and collective suffering is drawn by Plath's art in a way that not every reader has found convincing. Howe, for example, extends his criticism of "Daddy" to the whole of "Ariel." "What illumination—moral, psychological, social—can be provided of either [extreme situations] or the general human condition by a writer so deeply rooted in the extremity of her plight?" he asks. And yet what was exacted from Plath was so far beyond what was expected of the gushing girl with the Samsonite luggage that we must all agree on the singularity of the achievement. How the child, "plump and golden in America," became the woman, thin and white in Europe, who wrote poems like "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy" and "Edge," remains an enigma of literary history—one that is at the heart of the nervous urgency that drives the Plath biographical enterprise, and of the hold that the Plath legend continues to exert on our imaginations.



THE SILENT WOMAN—II

"Bitter Fame," by Anne Stevenson, written with the coöperation of the Plath estate, attempted to shed new light on the Plath-Hughes marriage. Instead, it started a conflagration—a literary scandal—from which sparks are still flying.

A FAST train was bearing me to Durham, in the North of England, where Anne Stevenson lived. I had met Anne earlier, a year after the publication of *"Bitter Fame,"* and the meeting had been depressing. I spent two hours with her at the University Women's Club, in London, where she was staying—she had come to town to give a lecture—and although the serene literary figure I had imagined for so many years occasionally came into view, it was mostly obscured by an upset, beset, wound-up woman pouring out her grievances. Public hostility toward Anne had not abated. She was still being pilloried—and she was still under the delusion that she could persuade the press that her punishment was unjust. She had been telling journalists—I was only the latest in a series—of the intolerable pressure

Olwyn Hughes had put on her during the writing of the biography, how a gun had been held to her head, how she had been forced to produce and publish a book that was not her own. But the press had used Anne's complaints about Olwyn only to embellish its original narrative; to have done otherwise would have been to disobey a fundamental rule of journalism, which is to tell a story and *stick to it*. The narratives of journalism (significantly called "stories"), like those of mythology and folklore, derive their power from their firm, undeviating sympathies and antipathies. Cinderella must remain good and the stepsisters bad. "Second stepsister not so bad after all" is not a good story. Anne Stevenson had to remain bad in the scandal of *"Bitter Fame."* Her fight with Olwyn had to be shrugged off as a falling-out among

thieves—a distasteful spectacle, and nothing more.

Anne appeared defeated and ground down, and there seemed to me to be something peculiarly English in the atmosphere of her abjection. The lobby of the University Women's Club, where we sat at a little, wobbly glass-topped table, only accentuated my sense of the complicity of England in the downward movement of Anne's life. The room had a dour and pinched character; its faded beige wallpaper and sagging brown armchairs seemed gratuitously dismal. Anne herself, who had come out of the elevator with a mackintosh over her arm, wearing sensible short boots and silver-rimmed glasses that gave her face a somewhat prim and severe look, also seemed unnecessarily drab. At fifty-seven, she was still a beautiful woman, and whenever she took

Above: Plath with her mother and children at Court Green, Devon, in July, 1962.

off her glasses her face was transformed. Her eyes were extraordinary: very blue, with heavy lids like Virginia Woolf's. There were moments, too, when the torrent of defensive words would abate and flashes of irony would lighten the tense, heavy atmosphere of the interview. After telling me of her sense of the deep injury and injustice done her by a very unpleasant review in the *TLS* of her new book of poems, "The Other House"—a review that accused her of being envious of Sylvia Plath, and that wounded her more than all the reviews of "Bitter Fame"—Anne smiled and said, "But it doesn't kill anyone to be bitterly hurt from time to time. It's not as if I were being tortured and my nails pulled out." She added, "But it does make me very touchy and very vulnerable," and this touchiness and vulnerability dominated her discourse, giving it its weak and unpersuasive character.

As it happened, she did not need to persuade me. I was already on her side. My narrative would be revisionist—not only because of my idealization of her as a literary artist but because of an experience of my own that paralleled hers. A short time earlier, I, too, had written an unpopular book, and I, too, had been attacked in the press. I had been there—on the helpless side of the journalist-subject equation. Now my journalist's "objectivity" was impaired. I arranged to see Anne again, and I was pretty sure that further meetings would restore her image to the privileged place it had occupied in my imagination for so many years. But I took careful note of the bad impression she made on me at our first encounter. I felt there was something here that illustrated a problem of biography—the problem of how to write about people who can no longer change their contemporaries' perception of them, who are discovered frozen in certain unnatural or unpleasant attitudes, like characters in tableaux vivants or people in snapshots with their mouths open. As a journalist dealing with a live subject, I had an advantage over the biographer dealing with a dead one: I could go back to Anne again (and again and again, if necessary) to draw my portrait of her. I could get her to move, to let her arm drop, to close her mouth. I could actually ask her the questions the biographer only wishes he could ask his subject. The journalist's subject, for his part, is aware of the advantage of not being dead, and glad of the opportunity for further sittings.

In the following months, in correspondence with both Anne and Olwyn, the issue of contingency would come up repeatedly: "I said this then, but I wouldn't say it now. Don't hold me to this, don't use that, don't think that this is the whole truth about me." After our meeting at the University Women's Club, I had received a letter from Anne whose opening sentence was a kind of herald of the theme that would be a leitmotiv of her (and Olwyn's) letters to me. "After last night's conversation," Anne wrote, "I do want to clarify certain things I said or counter-said. Since life is an ongoing process, most people, certainly myself, contradict themselves constantly, according to time and mood. My feeling about the 'truth' in human exchange can perhaps be expressed only in 'fiction'—poetry or prose." This was counterbalanced by a letter from Olwyn disclaiming what she had said in the Indian restaurant: "Talking, I express, probably too frankly, whatever aspect of this or that is running in my mind at the time—which can give false impressions of varying kinds—and whatever one says seems to be seized on and immediately deformed by the cultists. Phrases I wrote in haste years ago have been taken out of context and misunderstood (they were doubtless pretty imprecise as they were written), then used and quoted as my entire attitude on various points."

My entire attitude. At the end of Borges's story "The Aleph," the narrator goes to the cellar of a house, where he has the experience of encountering everything in the world. He all at once sees all places from all angles: "I saw tigers, pistons, bison, tides, and armies; I saw all the ants on the planet. . . . I saw the circulation of my own dark blood." Writer's block derives from the mad ambition to enter that cellar; the fluent writer is content to stay in the close attic of partial expression, to say what is "running through his mind," and to accept that it may not—cannot—be wholly true, to risk that it will be misunderstood. I, too, have spent days fruitlessly hanging around the door to that forbidden cellar. I have looked at my revisionist narrative and found it wanting. I have found every other narrative wanting. How can one see all the ants on the planet when one is wearing the blinders of narrative? On the train to Durham, however, I was still free of the (philosopher's) disease, and read with fascination and admiration the type-

script of a lecture Anne had given in Toronto the previous October. It was entitled "The Making of 'Bitter Fame,'" and in it the inchoate ramblings of the interview at the University Women's Club had been gathered into a coherent and vivid narrative. Here the voice was strong and clear, the tone assured.

The lecture begins with a discussion of parallels that Anne sees between herself and Plath:

Plath and I were born within months of each other, in the autumn and winter of 1932 and 1933. We had in common American parents of German descent, though her background, unlike mine, was undilutedly Teutonic. Our fathers were both university professors. As children, we attended similar public (state) elementary schools, and as teenagers we graduated in the same year (1950) from middle-class, "college-orientated" American high schools. . . .

Our attentive mothers encouraged us to think of ourselves as "special." In college (I entered the University of Michigan the same year Sylvia started at Smith), while assuming that life would provide us with a happily-ever-after marriage and untroublesome children, we were fiercely determined to make the most of our talents. I am still coming to terms with my youthful, self-centered, characteristically American ambition to be "great." . . . What Sylvia Plath and I had unequivocally in common in the 1950s was, of course, marriage to an Englishman and transplantation, as naive young women, from open-minded, prosperous America to class-ridden, war-depleted England. Like many, when I first began looking at Plath's life, I assumed that Plath's troubles stemmed from the difficulty of making that adjustment—particularly as a woman. I realized that my own numb misery in England after marriage was in good part due to what is commonly known as "culture shock." . . . I supposed that Sylvia Plath, while imagining she was at home in British society, had in fact underestimated her own defensive naïveté, especially among English intellectuals.

After this prologue, Anne gets down to the business of confessing her own defensive naïveté and relating how she allowed herself to be caught in the web from which she was still trying to disentangle herself. It all began quietly and unportentously, as these things do. In 1985, Anne accepted a commission to write a short biographical study of Plath (about a hundred pages) for a Penguin series called *Lives of Modern Women*. By the fall of 1986, she had completed a rough draft, and decided to send the first and last chapters to Ted Hughes for his comments. She knew Hughes slightly from the world of English poetry. Hughes was abroad, however, and his wife, Carol, telephoned Anne and suggested that she send her chapters to

Olwyn. Anne did so, and Olwyn was soon on the phone herself. "She said what I had written was largely misconceived but she liked my cool, terse style, and wouldn't I come around one day the following week and talk about the book over lunch?"

At the lunch, in a French restaurant in Camden Town, Olwyn did her customary growling about the Plath myth and the "libbers" and "cultists" who had caused Ted Hughes his sufferings, but flatteringly exempted Anne from her portrait of Plath's biographers as a breed of malignant incompetents. On parting, she gave Anne a sheaf of letters that Dido Merwin had written to Linda Wagner-Martin about Plath. Wagner-Martin, while working on her biography, had been in the habit of sending chapters to her sources for comment. Dido, on reading the chapters based on her letters, withdrew them. "You have your reasons for not wanting to acknowledge the crucial fact that Sylvia was a pathological *punisher* and Ted a constitutional *forgiver*," she wrote Wagner-Martin. "I have my reasons for not wanting to have anything to do with a book that attempts to cover this up." Anne writes, "Olwyn thought I should see the Merwin letters; they would show me a Sylvia Plath very different from the victimized martyr of the myth," and goes on:

When I read Mrs. Merwin's letters, I confess I burst out laughing. Their bite, their wit, their unmistakable tone of bitchy, scornful, sophisticated English superiority, decked out with French phrases and trenchant literary allusions, substantiated much that I had already surmised about Sylvia's bewilderment among the English literati. Where I had shrunk into myself in England, Sylvia had come out fighting. Dido Merwin's letters—a pungent foretaste of what was to come in her memoir—accused Sylvia of monstrous behaviour: rudeness, selfishness, insensitivity, social blindness, but most of all jealousy. The letters were clearly an invaluable source of anti-cultist information, though I thought they threw at least as much light on Dido's character as on Sylvia's.

At a second meeting with Anne, a few weeks later, Olwyn delivered her spider's invitation. She proposed that Anne withdraw her hundred-page study from the Penguin series and expand it into a book, for which she, Olwyn, would negotiate contracts with American and English publishers. (Olwyn ran a small literary agency in addition to her work as Cer-

berus to the Plath estate.) She offered to act as Anne's agent and promised to get her large advances. Moreover, she would give the signal to friends of Ted Hughes, who had loyally kept silent for almost twenty-five years, that it was finally safe to tell what they knew to a trusted new biographer. In the meanwhile, Hughes had returned to England and written Anne a long letter about the two chapters she had sent him. Unlike the fifteen-page list of laconic and scornful comments he had sent to Wagner-Martin on reading her manuscript a few months earlier ("page 201, line 4: delete 'making love'"; "page 200, line 6: delete 'and ripped . . . cheek'"; "page 273, line 27-28: To mention these petty details at all sounds like burlesque; delete"), Hughes's seven-page letter to Anne was friendly, respectful, and (considering his policy of reserve) remarkably forthcoming in details about his life with

Plath. As it turned out, this letter was not only the first but the last of Hughes's letters to Anne during the writing of "Bitter Fame." At the time, however, it acted as a powerful inducement; to have the brother's flattering attentions added to the sister's made the latter's offer impossible to resist.

Anne entered the web. By the end of November, Olwyn, acting with characteristic dispatch and efficiency, had negotiated contracts with Houghton Mifflin in America and Viking in England, which yielded the promised substantial advances (forty thousand dollars from Houghton Mifflin and fifteen thousand pounds from Viking). She lined up the promised friends; there was seemingly nothing she couldn't or wouldn't do to help. She gave Anne the use of her large Plath library. She interviewed witnesses. She shared her own reminiscences of Plath. She wrote analyses of Plath's poetry. She read drafts of chapters as Anne wrote them, and offered criticism. She acted as an emissary to Ted. Anne already shared Olwyn's view of Plath as a brilliant poet but a trying and unlovable person, and she and Olwyn would meet twice a week in Olwyn's apartment (at that time Anne was living in London with her husband-to-be, Peter Lucas) and talk about Plath with the sort of delicious malice one permits oneself with close, like-minded friends. In all prob-

ability, it was this trace of Anne's negative feelings about Plath, rather than her "cool, terse style," that had first captured Olwyn's interest and made her feel she had finally found the right biographer—the biographer who would draw the likeness of Plath that was needed to counteract the libbers' idealized portrait. Olwyn regaled Anne with stories of Plath's unattractive behavior, and Anne listened without protest, if not entirely without skepticism. Then, in the early summer of 1987, with an outline of the expanded biography in hand, Anne flew to Boston to meet Peter Davison, the book's editor at Houghton Mifflin, and to work with him on it, chapter by chapter. Davison approved the early chapters but felt—and Anne agreed—that the final two chapters were thin and incomplete. "In the absence of any more information from Ted Hughes," her lecture continues, "I decided to fly to Indiana and spend a week combing the archives of the Lilly Library there."

At the Lilly, Anne had a revelation. "I discovered Sylvia Plath in her own, unexpurgated letters and in letters to her from her friends and lovers. . . . These letters, these breathing pieces of paper, brought [her] to life for me as the memoirs of the witnesses I had talked to had not." Anne goes on:

Perhaps I was responding to the unselfconsciousness of the evidence, none of it trimmed for production to biographers, all of it conveying the contingent, as-yet-unfictionalized, still-happening present. . . . I came to feel in Indiana that I had finally met Sylvia Plath; that I was fonder of her because I knew her. I went back to her journal and re-read it with renewed understanding. . . . I began to understand, I think, why she had to become the extremist, uncompromising poet she was. Nothing in the middle lane would do. . . . Evening after evening, I emerged, dazed, from the air-conditioned library into the oppressive humidity of dripping Indiana nights. (I had forgotten the heavy, adhesive clasp of mid-western summers.) Living Sylvia's life instead of my own, I began to experience for the first time that intense feeling of identification with my subject that most biographers feel before they even begin their research. I realized sadly that I admired but had never liked Sylvia. Even before I began working with Olwyn Hughes, I had recoiled from what seemed to me her crude self-absorption and aggressive ambition. Now, I thought, I was beginning to see her in the round. I decided to go back to London and pick *Bitter Fame* to pieces once again. This time I was sure I could put together a critical biography myself.

Back in London, Anne set to work on her newly conceived biography. She was on course now, and no longer needed a

genic. She knew what she was doing, and would work alone. She commanded Olwyn back into the lamp. Naturally, Olwyn refused. For the next two years, Anne and Olwyn were locked in mortal, uneven combat over the book. Anne's attempts to reclaim it—to be the author of her own book—were unsuccessful; she had lost control of the text when she made her devil's pact with Olwyn. Olwyn maintained her iron grip. Anne was always forced to retreat, compromise, give up something she wanted to use, put in something she wanted to leave out. Olwyn would not allow Anne to reject her offerings of hostile testimony. Anne's weak struggles on the pin, her attempts to stand up to Olwyn, only invited Olwyn's contempt and wrath. By 1988, things had reached such a pass that the "collaborators" were not speaking. Then, as the book was about to go the way of all the other failed Plath biographies, Peter Davison stepped in, and his offer to act as the final arbiter of what was to go into the book was accepted by both women. In 1989, a text was finally produced—one that Anne was not sure she wanted to publish under her name: "I had serious reservations as to whether I could allow the book to be represented as my work alone, rather than as the joint work of Olwyn Hughes and myself." Davison assured her that the book was "essentially mine (as indeed most of the writing still was)," and persuaded her to let the book appear as her own. She agreed, but wrote an Author's Note to apprise the reader of Olwyn's presence in the text. When Olwyn read the note ("admittedly a sotto-voce disclaimer on my part," Anne writes, "the ambiguity of which she was quick to pick up"), she would not have it: "On pain of instantly withdrawing permission to quote from Plath's writings, published and unpublished, she at the last minute substituted the present 'Author's Note,' which encourages the reader to believe that the book appeared after Olwyn's revisions and improvements had been gratefully received."

THE train to Durham was a powerful express, and, unlike the sickly trains I had been stuck on earlier (and was to be

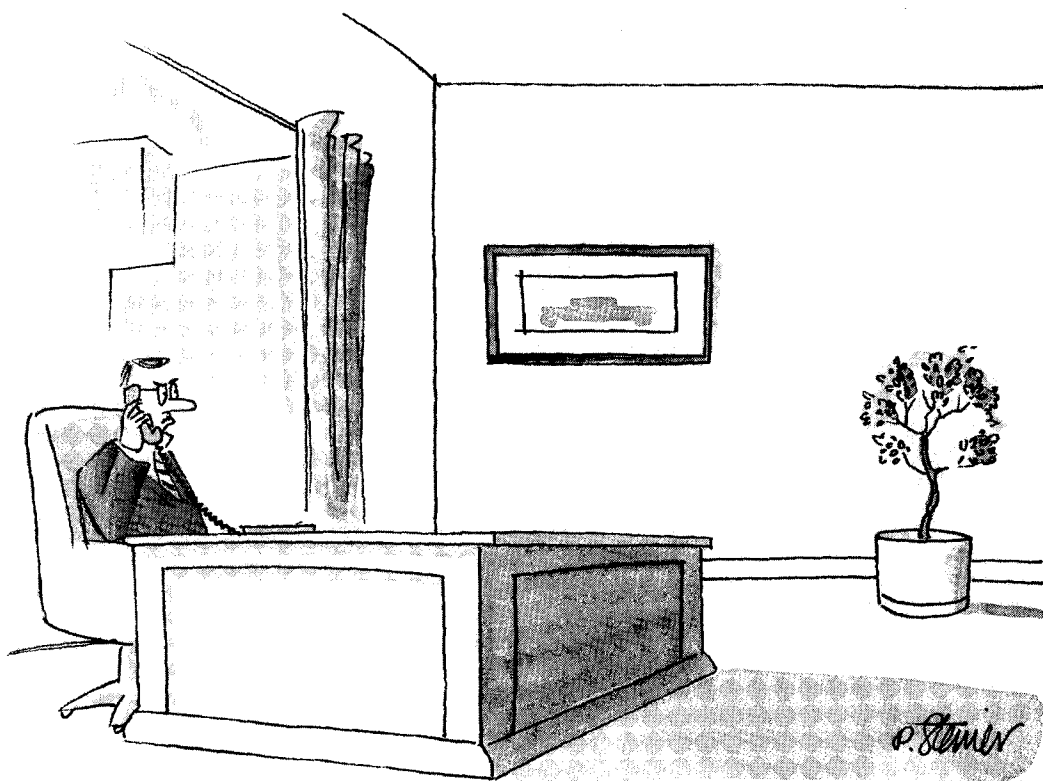
stuck on a few days later), it made its way to Durham through the snow-covered country without incident. But the trip lasted nearly four hours, and I had time to read and reread various other writings by Anne in preparation for my interview with her at her house. One of these was a blue aerogram I had received from her at the end of January, a few days after a telephone call:

We never touched on the subject of "victims." I do believe Sylvia's suicide has had a devastating effect on all associated with her—including her biographers. . . . All of us suffered a trauma of associated guilt. My argument with Sylvia is essentially a moral, philosophical one: to me, no art, no "great poem" is worth that much human suffering. . . . The notion that "perspective" has any place in Great Art is anathema, of course, to latter-day Romantics. But belief in "Art" of this kind, in the so-called "risk" of Art and the existential dilemma of the artist (Give me genius or give me death!), is, for me, akin to the beliefs of fundamentalist religious fanatics. . . . I disagree with Alvarez, with Plath, with Ted Hughes (perhaps) when they contend that the pursuit of the absolute has anything to do with the pursuit of truth. Truth is, in its nature, multiple and contradictory, part of the flux of history, untrappable in language. The only real road to truth is through doubt and tolerance. Unfortunately, philosophical skepticism can also become a mannerism; and the doubting leader is usually a bad one.

One more thing. Although I never con-

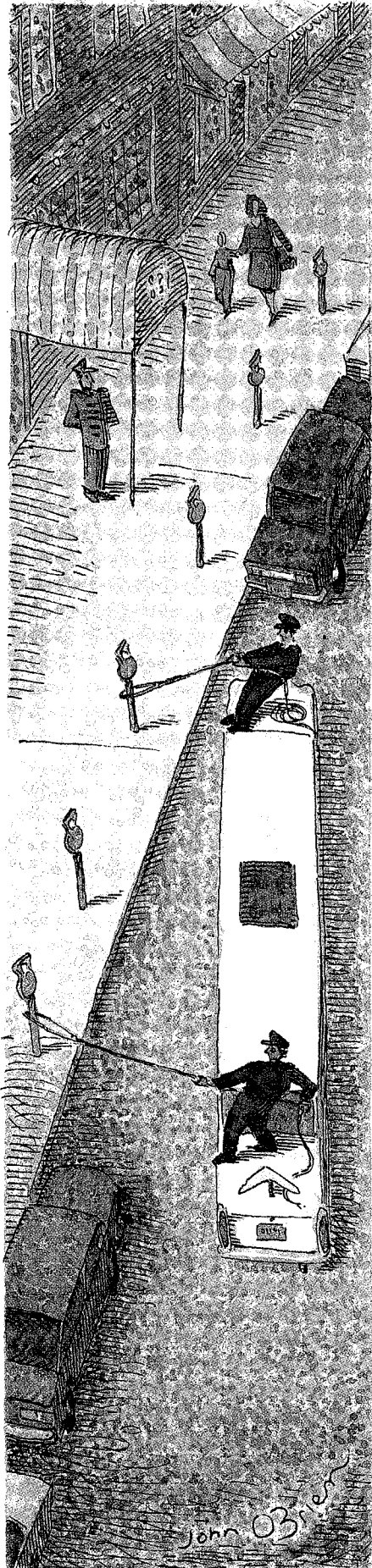
templated suicide, for a long time in the 1970s I was, through my weakness and misery, to all intents and purposes an alcoholic. I have never confessed this to anyone outside the family; but I think you ought to know that my life has not been that of a nice bourgeois wife and mother. I left my children in Oxford (no, in Glasgow) in 1971, to the care of their father and grandparents, and went to live with a poet in a sort of desperate bid for my "real" self. I don't know if it was the *time* that was responsible (the infectious counter-culture) or my own New England puritan upbringing. In any case, I spent ten or so years "in the wilderness"—writing "Correspondences" of course. But—and this is the point—*divided*. I now try to forget, as far as possible, those nightmare years. But I do know firsthand something of what Sylvia suffered, and Ted also. . . . I cannot believe that a biographer who does not understand the pervading madness of S.'s time can possibly understand her despair. Alvarez, of course, does; but he *admires* the extremism, self-indulgence, narcissism that I, after long experience, deplore.

While I had been astonished by Anne's candor when I first read the letter, I was not surprised by the revelation itself. "Correspondences," although not autobiographical in any literal sense, had prepared me for it. Indeed, I would have been surprised if Anne *had* been a nice bourgeois wife and mother and had only imagined the pain and mess she wrote about in her poem. In another document I had taken with me on the train, an au-



"Security? There's a goddam tree in my office."

PIER PRESSURE



tobiographical sketch published in 1989 in a series called Contemporary Authors, Anne had set down the literal facts of her life—citing the actual parents, siblings, husbands, lovers, children, and moves from place to place (usually university towns) on both sides of the Atlantic. Here, again, the sense of an unconventional, unsettled life was rendered. But it was a fourth piece of writing—an essay called “Writing as a Woman,” which appeared in a feminist anthology (“Women Writing and Writing About Women”; 1979)—that brought Anne into the sharpest focus for me, and made me feel I understood something about what had reduced her, a woman of substance and achievement, to the condition of helpless abjection that marked her encounter with Olwyn Hughes. I had asked Anne if there had been other relationships in her life like her relationship with Olwyn, and she had said no, she had never met anyone like Olwyn before, or ever had a relationship anything like her relationship with Olwyn. But now it seemed to me that Anne had not looked closely enough. She had also said, “The image I have of myself and Olwyn is of me sitting happily at my desk writing, with Olwyn looking over my shoulder. Every time she doesn’t like what I write she shoves me off the chair and takes up the pen herself.” In “Writing as a Woman” Anne studies herself and her twenty-five-year-long efforts—only intermittently successful—to stay in her writer’s chair, and not be shoved off by some Olwyn-like force. The first of these forces, she says, was the pressure of “what used to be called ‘womanliness’—sex, marriage, children, and the socially acceptable position of wife.” Anne writes that she had not been willing to sacrifice her life as a woman in order to have a life as a writer, as Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Stevie Smith, and Marianne Moore, among other spinster writers, had done. “Surely in the twentieth century, when society allows so much, it ought to be possible to be a fulfilled woman and an independent writer without guilt. . . . As I look back over my own experience, I see, however, that I have only *just* managed to survive.” She speaks of the traditional opposition between domesticity and creativity: “Writing poetry is not like most jobs; it can’t be rushed or done well between household chores—at least not by me. The mood of efficiency, of checking things off the list as you tear through

a day’s shopping, washing, cleaning, mending, and so forth, is totally destructive of the slightly bored melancholy which nurtures my imagination.” But a few pages later Anne rejects this theory of her failure to write during the unhappy five years of her first marriage (to Robin Hitchcock, a well-meaning and rather baffled young English businessman, who is the father of her daughter, Caroline). She sees that she was unconsciously following the pattern set by her mother, who had also wanted to be a writer but had been prevented by guilt toward her family. “I began to realize that guilt could also be an *excuse*. If I had really wanted to write, I would have done so. So would my mother. . . . There is always time. No amount of housework or baby-tending takes time from writing if you really want to write. Sylvia Plath wrote her great last poems in the early morning before her babies were awake.”

In the early seventies, divorced from Robin and now married to Mark Elvin, a scholar, and the mother of two more children, Anne began work on “Correspondences,” the earnest of her desire to write and the tour de force that was to be the centerpiece of her poet’s career. Through letters written by the members of a single family over many generations, the book-length poem tells its story—of the iron hold of the puritan ethic in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, of its gradual loosening in the mid-twentieth century, and of its dissolution during the nineteen-sixties. The letters spell out the toll this ethic took of the lives it ruled—the lives of men no less than of women, though the women seem more crushed. A yearning that cannot be acted upon but is never absent from the margins of each correspondent’s consciousness pervades the poem and gives it its pathos. The work is brilliant, the voices of the letter writers are distinct, various, true. It has a poetic inventiveness, a sureness and confidence, along with a risk-taking nervousness, that bear the reader along as if he were reading a novel. How did Anne do it? How did she pull off the feat of breaking out of her mother’s pattern and reconciling the claims of domesticity with those of self-expression?

Well, she didn’t. As she wrote in her letter to me and in her autobiographical sketch, she had to leave her children and her second husband and go off with a poet—Philip Hobsbaum—to bring “Correspondences” to fruition. Like

Plath, like so many women writers, she had to leave the daylight world and go underground to find her voice. Writing is a fraught activity for everyone, of course, male or female, but women writers seem to have to take stronger measures, make more peculiar psychic arrangements, than men do to activate their imaginations. Plath's own writing life, as we know from her journals and letters, from the testimony of Hughes and the writings themselves, was, until the final period, a painful struggle, a repeated, bloodying beating of the head against a wall. She started writing and publishing very early. (A poem was published in the *Christian Science Monitor* and a story in *Seventeen* when she was seventeen herself.) She had a great will to write (fuelled by the ambition of her real and internalized mother), and her capacity for rejection was apparently limitless: she received forty-five rejection slips from *Seventeen* before that story was finally accepted. But she herself rejected as unworthy most of what she wrote—poetry or prose, published or unpublished. In Ted Hughes's introduction to "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams," he tells us that "her story-writing . . . always took place in an atmosphere of locked combat." The introduction—another variant on the true-self/false-self theme—sets forth the painful history of Plath's humiliating defeat by the genre she had chosen as her means of artistic and professional autonomy:

Her ambition to write stories was the most visible burden of her life. Successful story-writing, for her, had all the advantages of a top job. She wanted the cash, and the freedom that can go with it. She wanted the professional standing, as a big earner, as the master of a difficult trade, and as a serious investigator into the real world. . . . "For me," she wrote, "poetry is an evasion from the real job of writing prose."

But she failed with her stories (her ambition to publish fiction in *The New Yorker* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* was never achieved), and, in Hughes's view, she had made a bad miscalculation in trying to write them. Her true vocation, like her true self, lay elsewhere. Throughout his essay Hughes quotes the self-denigrating comments Plath wrote in her journal: "Read over the stories written in Spain. They are so dull. Who would want to read them?" and "My Shadow story reads mighty thin, mighty pale," and "Disgust with the seventeen-page story I just finished: a stiff, artificial piece . . . none of the deep emotional undercurrents gone

into or developed. As if little hygienic trap-doors shut out the seethe and deep-grounded swell of my experience. Putting up pretty artificial statues. I just can't get outside myself."

Hughes argues, "It was only when she gave up that effort to 'get outside' herself, and finally accepted the fact that her painful subjectivity was her real theme, and that the plunge into herself was her only real direction, and that poetic strategies were her only real means, that she suddenly found herself in full possession of her genius—with all the special skills that had developed, as if by biological necessity, to deal with those unique inner conditions." But this theory of Plath's art, beautifully articulated though it is, doesn't satisfy. It restates what we already know—that Plath's "Ariel" poems are successful and the short stories are not—and it misstates the character of the achievement of "Ariel," in which Plath did nothing if not "get outside" herself. If she hadn't, we wouldn't be reading the poems; they would simply be the inarticulate cries of an anguished woman. Which, in a sense, the stories are. There is one, called "The Wishing Box," written in 1956, that illuminates the problem of the stories in an especially arresting way. It is one of the weakest and most artificial of them all, but it comes to riveting life when it is read—as it begs to be—as a coded message about the predicament Plath felt herself to be in as a writer. Although Hughes does not discuss "The Wishing Box" in his introduction, he makes a general comment about the stories that cannot but affect our reading of it: "The themes she found engaging enough to excite her concentration all turn out to be episodes from her own life; they are all autobiography."

"The Wishing Box"—which may have been one of the "dull" stories written in Spain, where Hughes and Plath spent a long honeymoon—begins with a scene at the breakfast table of a couple named Harold and Agnes. Agnes "smoldered in silence over her coffee, wrestling with the strange jealousy which had been growing on her like some dark, malignant cancer ever since their wedding night only three months before when she had discovered about Harold's dreams." Harold's dreams are maddeningly rich and interesting and abundant, in contrast to Agnes's, which (when she dreams at all) are prosaic, te-

dious, and fragmentary. As Harold obliviously regales Agnes with his marvellous dreams, she feels more and more inadequate and envious and left out. One day, she confesses her dreamer's block to Harold. He is sympathetic—in his superior way—and proposes a mental exercise to stimulate her imagination, involving the closing of her eyes as she imagines an object. But the exercise doesn't work—it only adds to her feeling of insufficiency—and as time goes on she feels more and more miserable, takes to drink and to watching television, and finally, sunk in despondency, swallows fifty sleeping pills. The story ludicrously ends when Harold comes home from work and finds her lying dead on the living-room sofa, dressed in her emerald taffeta evening gown.

We note how closely Agnes's low estimate of her dreams resembles Plath's low estimate of her stories. But the most conspicuous feature of "The Wishing Box"—its emotional matrix—is the wife's hostility and envy. Until she found out about her husband's extraordinary dreams, her own prosaic dreams did not disturb her. Only after Harold has displayed the "royal baroque splendor" of his nightly productions do Agnes's own productions seem to her so pathetic and wanting. The premise of the story—that a woman's life can be poisoned, and even ultimately destroyed, by her feelings of inadequacy in the face of a man's superior achievements—is as far-fetched and remote from observable experience as the Freudian concept of penis envy. And as true. (Freud's concept, of course, is not simply about anatomical

difference but about what that difference connotes; it is a *description* of phallocentrism, not a recommendation of it.) The awful mixture of self-loathing and loathing and envy that Plath expresses in "The Wishing Box" is a central concern, perhaps the central concern, of contemporary feminism. But in 1956 there was no feminist movement or feminist theory, and relations between men and women were at a nadir of helpless transference misprision. That Plath's struggles with writing should have become fused with her envy and resentment of men is not surprising. Many women who were trying to write in the fifties and sixties—women like Plath and Anne Stevenson and me—found themselves



playing a kind of Harold-and-Agnes game with the men they were involved with. Writing got all mixed up with men. It was in some way the man's fault when the writing didn't go well, as it was Harold's fault when Agnes's dreaming didn't go well.

The smug, hateful Harold (he is a certified accountant "with pronounced literary leanings") would appear to be as far from the large-souled Adam of the "Letters Home" as one could come. (Harold resembles, if anyone, the smug, hateful Buddy Willard of "The Bell Jar.") In November, 1956, Plath wrote to Aurelia, "We have such lovely hours together. . . . We read, discuss poems we discover, talk, analyze—we continually fascinate each other. It is heaven to have someone like Ted who is so kind and honest and brilliant—always stimulating me to study, think, draw, and write. He is better than any teacher, even fills somehow that huge, sad hole I felt in having no father. I feel every day how wonderful he is and love him more and more." And yet Ted-as-Harold was there, too, evidently. The testimony of the story when it is read together with that of the "Letters Home" gives us a powerful sense of the anarchy of mental life: in the unconscious we can comfortably love a person and hate his guts. It is only in conscious life that we feel we have to choose a side to come down on, decide one way or the other, surrender or fight, stay or go. In the case of Plath, it wasn't that she was more divided than the rest of us but only that she left such a full record of her ambivalences—which is why the study of her life is both so alluring and so disturbing, and why the predicament of her survivors is so dire. However, we cannot fail to notice a common denominator in the two visions of Hughes: he is a brilliant, kindly, lovable teacher or he is a stupid, smug, hateful one, but in both cases he is the *teacher* and she the *pupil*; she looks up to him, and she seeks help from him in filling the "huge, sad hole" of her inadequacy.

On the train, as I read over Plath's biographer's writings about her own struggle to be a literary artist, and pondered her many inevitably troubled relationships with men, on whom she had conferred more responsibility for the working out of her artistic fate than they could know what to do with, I began to obscurely make out a pattern to which the mired history of "Bitter Fame" be-

longed. In her autobiographical sketch, Anne writes of a period (1973-75) when, "Correspondences" completed, "I finally plucked up courage to go it alone." Having left the poet for whom she had left husband and children, she spent "two fruitful, independent years" as a writer-in-residence at the University of Dundee. But when, a decade later, the Plath biography confronted her with a literary project that was new and full of uncertainty, she once again drifted into a relationship of dependency, a sort of marriage of literary convenience, formed along familiar lines. That the new co-parent of Anne's literary progeny-to-be was a woman made no difference: the unconscious is no respecter of gender. But that the woman was who she was, with a special interest in the progeny, made all the difference in the world. Anne's previous "collaborators" had been willing to go away and leave custody of the work to her; Olwyn fought for custody tooth and nail. The fierceness of her involvement in "Bitter Fame" was apparent to me from Anne's Toronto lecture, and it would become even more apparent when I read the letters Olwyn wrote to Anne during their struggle for the book's authorship. But what I was most aware of now was the feeling of having stumbled across a key to the mystery of why Anne had walked so obliviously into Olwyn's web: she may have been too intent on weaving one of her own to notice where she was going.

ON March 9, 1956—thirteen days after her momentous first meeting with Ted Hughes at the *St. Botolph's Review* party, and three months before her marriage to him—Plath wrote to Aurelia:

Oh, mother, if only you knew how I am forging a soul! . . . I am making a self, in great pain, often, as for a birth, but it is right that it should be so, and I am being refined in the fires of pain and love. You know, I have loved Richard above and beyond all thought; that boy's soul is the most furious and saintly I have met in this world.

Richard? Who is this man? A slip of the pen? No, he is Richard Sassoon, of whom Plath goes on to write:

All my conventional doubts about his health, his frail body, his lack of that "athletic" physique which I possess and admire,



all pales to nothing at the voice of his soul, which speaks to me in such words as the gods would envy.

The day after she bit Hughes, Plath wrote of him in her journal as "the one man since I've lived who could blast Richard," but Hughes went back to London without attempting to see Plath again, and Sassoon remained the unblasted love of Plath's life for another month. As Anne Stevenson shrewdly surmises in "Bitter Fame," "although Sylvia had been violently attracted to Ted, the whole experience was too dreamlike to build hopes on, and, in any case, she still held to the habit of longing for Richard Sassoon." Of all the men in Plath's biography, Richard Sassoon is the most elusive and, in many ways, the most beguiling. The habit of longing for him has passed from Plath to the community of her biographers. Not one of them has been able to find him; he has disappeared without a trace. Not only his whereabouts but his entire post-Plath history is unknown. As Hughes has been trapped and imprisoned in the Plath legend, so Sassoon has flown out of it like a bird of summer.

He arrives in the story on April 19, 1954, in a letter from Plath to Aurelia: "Met Richard Sassoon (whose father is a cousin of Siegfried Sassoon)—a slender Parisian fellow who is a British subject and a delight to talk to." Plath was back at Smith after her breakdown of the previous summer and fall, and Sassoon was at Yale. On May 4th, Plath wrote again to her mother about Sassoon, expressing the ambivalence that was to mark her idea of him throughout his two-year sojourn in her life: "A good Saturday with Sassoon up here—most unique—another bottle of exquisite Bordeaux wine and a picnic of chicken sandwiches in a lovely green meadow. Strange and enchanting evening spent in farmhouse while waiting for Sassoon and tow truck to get his car out of quagmire on rutted dirt road." The man is wonderful at Bordeaux and chicken sandwiches but can't get his car out of a rut. A Smith roommate of Plath's, Nancy Hunter Steiner, recalls in her memoir "A Closer Look at Ariel" a stunningly cruel remark Plath made about Sassoon's small size: "When he holds me in his arms, I feel like Mother Earth with a small brown bug crawling on me." Steiner recalls Sassoon himself as "a dark, brooding, passionate Gallic

type whose brilliance and imagination were the equal of [Plath's]," and whom Plath endowed with "the qualities of a Byronic hero: an air of mystery and an almost sinister melancholia that she found fascinating." Steiner resolves the contradiction between Plath's views of Sassoon as a Byronic hero and as a crawling insect by attributing it to her "creativity."

As it happened, however, Sassoon, though he was "thin, nervous, little, moody, sickly" (in Plath's description of him in her journal), did not repel her, as other boyfriends she wrote about did. In fact, Plath's feelings about him, as they emerge from her writings, are movingly tender. His lack of physical attractiveness for her is something she regards with rue rather than resentment. If Plath actually permitted herself her bluntly mean comment to Steiner (the quotations of contemporary witnesses recollected after many years must always be regarded with skepticism), Sassoon emerges everywhere else in his Plath dossier as a sympathetic and appealing figure. As I read the intense, mannered love letters that Plath wrote to him in the winter of 1955-56—and made copies of for her journal—I was taken back to my own youth, and to the Sassoons I myself was in love with and loved to write ardent, pretentious letters to. Anne Stevenson told me that she, too, had had Sassoons in her life. The type flourished with special vigor in the Eisenhower fifties—it was a kind of joint creation of both sexes, a collaboration between bookish misfits, fulfilling each other's yearnings for romance. The boys invented themselves out of literary cloth (brooding, Gallic, Byronic, etc.), and the girls "read" them as if they were novels.

We do not have Plath's journals for the rest of her stay at Smith—she either didn't write them or didn't preserve them—and it isn't until the fall of 1955, when she was in Cambridge and Sassoon was studying at the Sorbonne, that the journals resume and we get the full flavor of her feeling for "this boy in France," as she spoke of him to the too young male undergraduates, to fend off their attentions. Sassoon, for his part, was fending Plath off. We don't know why—we don't have his letters from this period—but it appears that the emotional obstacles he put between himself and her (in her journal and letters she



"The intercooler removes heat from the turbocharged air-intake manifold, thereby increasing air density. As the air intake increases in efficiency, the gas temperature in the combustion chamber falls, suppressing the occurrence of knocking, and increasing engine output."

alludes to Sassoon's "ferocious, cold, and almost platonic scrupulosity," as well as to a Swiss mistress) only, or inevitably, kindled her passion. "I got a letter from my Richard this afternoon which shot all to hell but my sudden looking in myself and finding what I feared and fought so hard not to find: I love that damn boy with all I've ever had in me and that's a hell of a lot," she wrote in her journal. "Worse, I can't stop. . . I love him to hell and back and heaven and back, and have and do and will. Somehow, this letter killed finally all those niggling doubts: you're as tall as he; you weigh more than he; you're physically as strong and healthier; you're more athletic." Just as Plath never wrote about Hughes without referring to his herculean hugeness, so Sassoon was never allowed to appear without his leitmotiv of Proustian (or Ralph Touchettian) frailness. To Sassoon himself she wrote, "I love you with all my heart and soul and body; in your weakness as in your strength; and for me to love a man even in his weakness is something I have never all my life been able to do before." She then (the letter is extremely long)

wanders off into an extraordinary vision of her woman's destiny:

I feel I cannot really ever live with another man; which means I must become (since I could not be a nun) a consecrated single woman. Now, if I were inclined to a career as a lawyer or journalist that would be all right. But I am not. I am inclined to babies and bed and brilliant friends and a magnificent stimulating home where geniuses drink gin in the kitchen after a delectable dinner and read their own novels and tell about why the stock market is the way it will be. . . —well, anyhow, this is what I was meant to make for a man, and to give him this colossal reservoir of faith and love for him to swim in daily, and to give him children; lots of them, in great pain and pride. And I hated you most, in my unreason, for making me woman, to want this, and making me your woman alone, and then making me face the very real and terribly immediate possibility that I would have to live my life chastely as a schoolteacher who sublimated by influencing other women's children. More than anything else in the world I want to bear you a son, and I go about full with the darkness of my flame, like Phèdre, forbidden by what austere pudeur, what fierté?

During Christmas vacation of 1955, Plath travelled in the South of France with Sassoon (this was when he evidently began to back away from her), and in the spring vacation she went to Paris to

throw herself at him. "I feel I somehow must just walk to Richard's early one morning and stand there, strong and contained, and say: hello," she writes in her journal three weeks before the trip. She adds, "Oh, yes, I still think I have power: he may be sleeping with his mistress, leaving orders for me not to be admitted, or not there, or if there, worse, refuse to see me." He is not there. In her journal entry of March 26th Plath writes of arriving on Palm Sunday at Sassoon's house, at 4 Rue Duvivier, after "preparing my opening speech," and being told by the "dark and suspicious" concierge that Sassoon was away and would not be back until after Easter. "I had been ready to bear a day or two alone, but this news shook me to the roots," Plath writes, and goes on:

I sat down in her living room and wrote an incoherent letter while the tears fell scalding and wet on the paper and her black poodle patted me with his paw and the radio blared: "Smile though your heart is breaking." I wrote and wrote, thinking that by some miracle he might walk in the door. But he had left no address, no messages, and my letters begging him to return in time were lying there blue and unread. I was really amazed at my situation; never before had a man gone off to leave me to cry after.

This is where the published journal entry

ends. The unpublished original entry, in the Smith archive, continues:

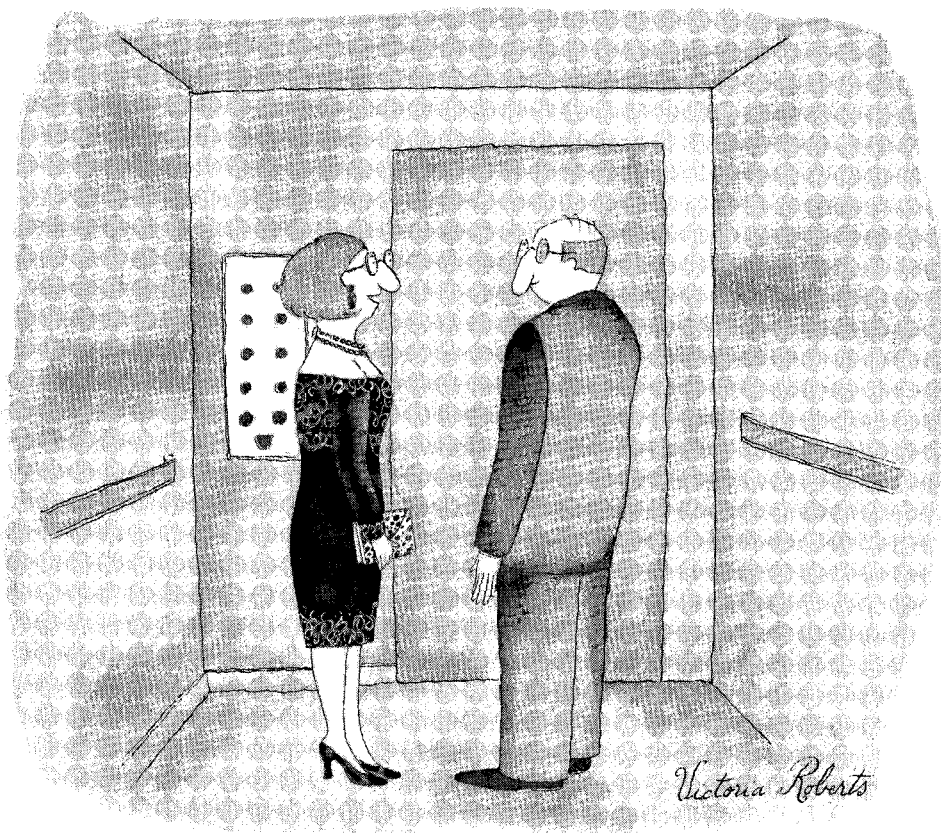
Dried tears, patted poodle, & asked where could find restaurant; wandered through fruit stalls in Champ-de-Mars through flowers & crowds bearing palm sprays (not like ours but all green small sprigs of leaves) and found large Brasserie. . . . Ordered Assiette Anglaise and coffee (which came black & sour) and read Anouilh's *Antigone*, that magnificent part the chorus does about tragedy. Gradually, amazingly, a calm stole over me. A feeling that I had as much right to take my time eating, to look around; to wander & sit in the sun in Paris as anyone; even more right. I felt downright happy when I ordered another cup of coffee with cream & it was much better.

When "The Journals" were published, in 1982, they were ungratefully received. Like "Bitter Fame," they arrived in a state of dishevelment that aroused the suspicions of reviewers. Hughes's revelation in his introduction that he had destroyed the last journal struck the first wrong note; the second was a preface by the book's editor, Frances McCullough, about cuts she made in the work. McCullough wrote:

Because it is very early—in terms of the ages of Plath's survivors—to release such a document, there has been special concern for those who must live out their lives as characters in this drama. There are quite a few

nasty bits missing—Plath had a very sharp tongue and tended to use it on nearly everybody, even people of whom she was inordinately fond. . . . So some of the more devastating comments are missing—these are marked "[omission]" to distinguish them from ordinary cuts—and there are a few other cuts—of intimacies—that have the effect of diminishing Plath's eroticism, which was quite strong.

McCullough's statement had an unfortunate result. By her bringing attention to what wasn't there, what was there was devalued. There is a belief abroad now that the published journals are some sort of censored and "suppressed" version of what Plath wrote, created by Hughes to protect himself. But in fact "The Journals" render a remarkably intimate portrait of Hughes, and have, if anything, a notably intrusive tendency; as with "Letters Home," one is struck much more by what has been allowed to stand about "those who must live out their lives as characters in this drama" than by what has been taken out. The cuts that concern Hughes seem pathetically modest: excisions of embarrassing encomiums to his "banging virility" or of an occasional wifely complaint about things like the state of his nails. Mrs. Plath also had a hand in the removal of the "nasty bits," and here, too, more was left in than one might have expected. The "ordinary cuts"—which are the large body of the cuts—were made by McCullough, in the un sinister interests of making a readable book out of a mass of writing of uneven quality. Her cutting was in aid of moving the narrative of Plath's life along. In this, she was assisted by Plath herself, for Plath indeed wrote about herself and the people she knew as if they were characters in a novel. The journals are a kind of furiously written first draft of a bildungsroman into which the writer pours everything, knowing there will be time later on to revise and cut and shape and order. Plath writes about people with a novelist's noticing eye, and the journals' atmosphere of intrusive intimacy derives from this. We "know" Hughes and Sassoon and Dick Norton and Aurelia and Plath herself in the way we "know" characters in novels, which is more deeply and clearly than we know anyone in life except our closest intimates. Because the Annas and Vronskys and Holden Caulfields and Humbert Humberts do not exist outside the pages of their novels, we are unembarrassed by our voyeurism, by the abashing amount



"My friend with the Tiffany lamps is Cora. My friend with the long-haired dachshunds is Noreen."

of personal information we receive about them. With the characters of Hughes and Sassoon and Norton and Aurelia, who have counterparts in life, we lose our feeling of comfortable omniscience; we feel we should look the other way—as in that moment of embarrassment when we meet our analyst on the street. As the analyst doesn't "belong" there—he should exist only in the consulting room—so the characters in Plath's journals become displaced persons of a sort. The character of Ted Hughes gives us the most trouble of all, since his real-life counterpart is so prominent—we keep fetching up against it in letters to newspapers, in publications of his work, in reviews of his work, in his activities as the executor of Plath's literary estate. With Sassoon, things are better: by obligingly disappearing from real life, he gives us leave to unanxiously enjoy his literary representation. Aurelia, for her part, foreshadows the eventual leaching of the traces of everyone "real" from the "fiction" of Plath's life; she is in her eighties and ill.

Plath's account of her spring vacation in France provides some of the journals' most vital moments, and has been little cut by McCullough. Her excision of the brasserie passage was a mistake, I think. Plath's recording of the calm stealing over her after she left Sassoon's house, and of her sense of her entitlement to the pleasures of Paris, wonderfully evokes the lability of feeling for which youth is famous but which is not exclusive to youth; one recalls Proust's anecdote about Swann's father, who leaves his beloved wife's death chamber in tears, and then finds himself exclaiming over the beauty of the day and the pleasure of being alive. The two coffees, the first black and sour and the second with its transforming cream, underscore the point. But I can also understand McCullough's eagerness to get on with the story, which Plath herself tells with a headlong impatience, as if racing to beat a deadline.

The story, which covers journal entries from March 26th to April 5th, is a meditation on Plath's fate as a woman. Finding herself alone in Paris, she is seized by a sense of crisis, a feeling that she has come to a turning point in her life among men. As Plath goes on to write of the new men she meets in Paris (an Italian journalist named Giovanni, whom she picks up on the street the night of her arrival, and who lends her the Olivetti on

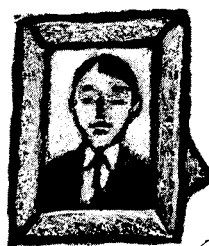
which she types the journal; an Oxford man named Tony with whom she goes to bed but who gets cold feet when it comes to the point), of the men she knows who happen to be in Paris at the time (Gary Haupt from Cambridge and Gordon Lameyer from America, both good-looking and dull), and of the absent Richard and Ted, she works herself into a fever of longing and dread, defiance and shame, resolution and vacillation. Hughes is now (rather shakily) installed in Plath's life. A few weeks after the *St. Botolph's* party, we learn from the journal, he returned to Cambridge and, late one night, with a Cambridge friend, threw stones at a window they thought was hers; Hughes returned to London without seeing her, but the friend, Lucas Myers, invited her to supper and then proposed that she meet him and Hughes in London on her way to Paris; she did this, and spent the night with Hughes, to her present vexation. "He does not know how much I could rip past here and be tender and wise, for now I am become too easy too soon and he will not bother to discover," she writes on Giovanni's Olivetti. In Cambridge, her timeless love for the diminutive Sassoon had not prevented her from aspiring to a crumb of attention from the magnificent Hughes. "Please let him come," she begged in her journal four days after writing Sassoon that she wanted to bear him a son. "Let me have him for this British spring. Please, please. . . . Please let him come, and give me the resilience and guts to make him respect me, be interested, and not to throw myself at him with loudness or hysterical yelling; calmly, gently, easy, baby, easy. . . . Oh, he is here, my black marauder; oh hungry hungry. I am so hungry for a big smashing creative burgeoning burdened love."

We know, though Plath doesn't as she sits typing in Paris, that she got Hughes for her British spring and after; she knows only that the weeks of her vacation stretch before her like the remaining years of a life (she can't go back to her dorm at Cambridge, which is closed for the vacation), and that neither of the two men she wants (at this point, Ted and Richard are almost interchangeable objects of desire) wants her. So she is reduced to filling the remaining vacation time in Europe travelling with the dreary

Gordon. "I would rather be alone with my typewriter than with Gordon," she writes, "and his stupid stammering French and inability to make himself understood here, his utter lack of rapport, of that intuitive sensing of mood disgusts me." But what is a girl to do? As if in a precognition of feminist consciousness, Plath pauses to ask, "Is it some dread lack which makes my alternatives so deadly? Some feeble dependence on men which

makes me throw myself on their protection and care and tenderness?" She rambles on incoherently about the men who are now her "alternatives." Sassoon, although unavailable, continues to haunt her with his "dark image"—and to displease her with his diminutive size. She contrasts his "slight, undisciplined body" and his "snail-and-wine taste" with "the orange-juice-and-broiled-chicken solidity" and "plain-steak-and-potatoes-with-nothing-done-to-them taste" of Gary and Gordon. (The huge Hughes has not yet sufficiently settled in Plath's imagination to be the only foil to Sassoon.) She considers telegraphing Hughes in London and asking if she can live with him in his flat until her dorm reopens but is inhibited by the thought of the bohemian friends who wander in and out of the flat, one of whom apparently walked in on her and Hughes in bed. In writing of her schoolgirl's dilemma of how to spend the rest of her vacation, Plath uses language like "Yes, all the auguries are for departure"; "And now the alternatives revolve in a fatal dance"; "It is the historic moment; all gathers and bids me to be gone from Paris." The Paris journal—like her journals in general—constitutes a kind of anatomy of the romantic imagination at work.

Plath's relentlessly humorless vision of herself as the heroine of a great drama gives her journal a verve and a lustre that the journals of more restrained, self-deprecating, classical (as opposed to romantic) writers lack. We all invent ourselves, but some of us are more persuaded than others by the fiction that we are interesting. Probably because Plath felt the chill of the void with such unnerving intensity did she need to put so many layers of heated self-absorption between herself and what lay outside. Stevenson begins "Bitter Fame" with an incident from Plath's young life, an anecdote about a



poem called "I Thought That I Could Not Be Hurt," written when Plath was fourteen, about some terrible wound and grief, which turned out to be Plath's grandmother's accidentally smudging one of Plath's pastel drawings. Already, at fourteen, Plath knew that if she didn't care too much she might not care at all. She articulates this knowledge in a letter to Sassoon of December 11, 1955: "Perhaps when we find ourselves wanting everything it is because we are dangerously near to wanting nothing." The "Ariel" poems trace the short trajectory from being close to wanting nothing to wanting nothing. In the final poems, written in the terrible English winter of her death, Plath, like a feverish patient throwing off a blanket, sheds the ragged mantle of her rage and calmly waits for the cold of her desirelessness to achieve its deadly warmth. The journals and letters are the record of Plath's struggle against clinical and (if the two may be separated) existential depression by means of the various manic defenses offered by the romantic imagination.

IN her own house, Anne Stevenson was not the person she had been at the University Women's Club. She sounded different—her speech was less clipped and British, and she spoke more slowly, more quietly, less compulsively—and she looked different: in a plaid skirt and red sweater, she had reacquired the coltish aspect I remembered from my glimpse of her in Michigan. At the University Women's Club, she had sat in a kind of dejected slump; at home, she was always in motion—jumping up to refill a teacup, dashing up the stairs to fetch a document, darting about the kitchen as she cooked the dinner she had invited me to stay for. She was a touchingly eager hostess. The house—two miners' cottages joined into a single two-story dwelling—was a maze of little rooms. I would wander into a room I thought I had been in before, and find I had not. There were at least two parlors, with fireplaces and books and pictures and sofas, each having the aspect of being *the* parlor. The rooms were separated by vague hallways into which dog-food and cat-food dishes and other unambiguously utilitarian objects (like a washing machine and a dryer) had found their way. The parlors were pleasant, inviting, slightly shabby, with pride of place given to books. The cat and the dog—

two quiet, friendly beasts—slept companionably by the fireside in the room where we sat, Anne in a bentwood rocker and I on a sofa. At my behest, she was turning her thoughts to the still painful subject of her collaboration with Olwyn on "Bitter Fame" and what she herself had done to contribute to the debacle, where she had gone wrong. Characteristically, she alighted on an "other man" who might have bailed her out. "I now wish I had gone to see Alvarez," she said. "I should have said to Olwyn, 'I want to talk to Al Alvarez and see what he thinks of this.' He is not a stupid man. He is the only person in the opposition I respect, and if I could have talked to him frankly about what Olwyn was doing I think he would have said, 'Of course. Olwyn is always like that. She makes everybody cry.' But I didn't talk to him, and I would cry all night. I had no heart, I was so crushed. Because Olwyn was so sure that I was stupid and not getting it." Anne paused to pour me another cup of tea. Then she spoke of another "other man." "I wished all the time that Ted had been willing to work with me. I wrote to him several times and talked with him on the telephone. But Olwyn guarded him very carefully. He would only meet me in Olwyn's house."

"So you never saw him alone?"

"I never saw him alone." She went on to give her sense of Hughes as a shy and passive man, someone more at ease with men than with women, but someone unable, because of his preternatural attractiveness and sexual magnetism, to avoid and sometimes even to withstand the insistent attentions of women. She then told the horrifying story of Assia Wevill's death. Wevill was the preternaturally beautiful and sexually magnetic woman who precipitated the Plath-Hughes breakup. In 1967, she had a child by Hughes, a girl named Shura, and, in 1969, in a bizarre gesture of imitation, she, too, gassed herself—adding the new twist of gassing the little girl as well. Hughes's sufferings may be (or, rather, can hardly be) imagined. The story of Assia Wevill's suicide does not appear in "Bitter Fame." Anne said that she had known it for years—that everyone in the English poetry world had known it—but had kept silent about it out of compassion for Hughes. (By the time of our talk, the story had already been told in the English press and was soon to be retailed in

Ronald Hayman's and Paul Alexander's biographies.) Hughes had asked Anne to keep mention of Assia to a minimum in her biography. "I didn't think of disobeying Ted," Anne said. "He isn't bullying. His sister's the bully. But he has this authority. When he says 'please don't'—he always says 'please'—you obey."

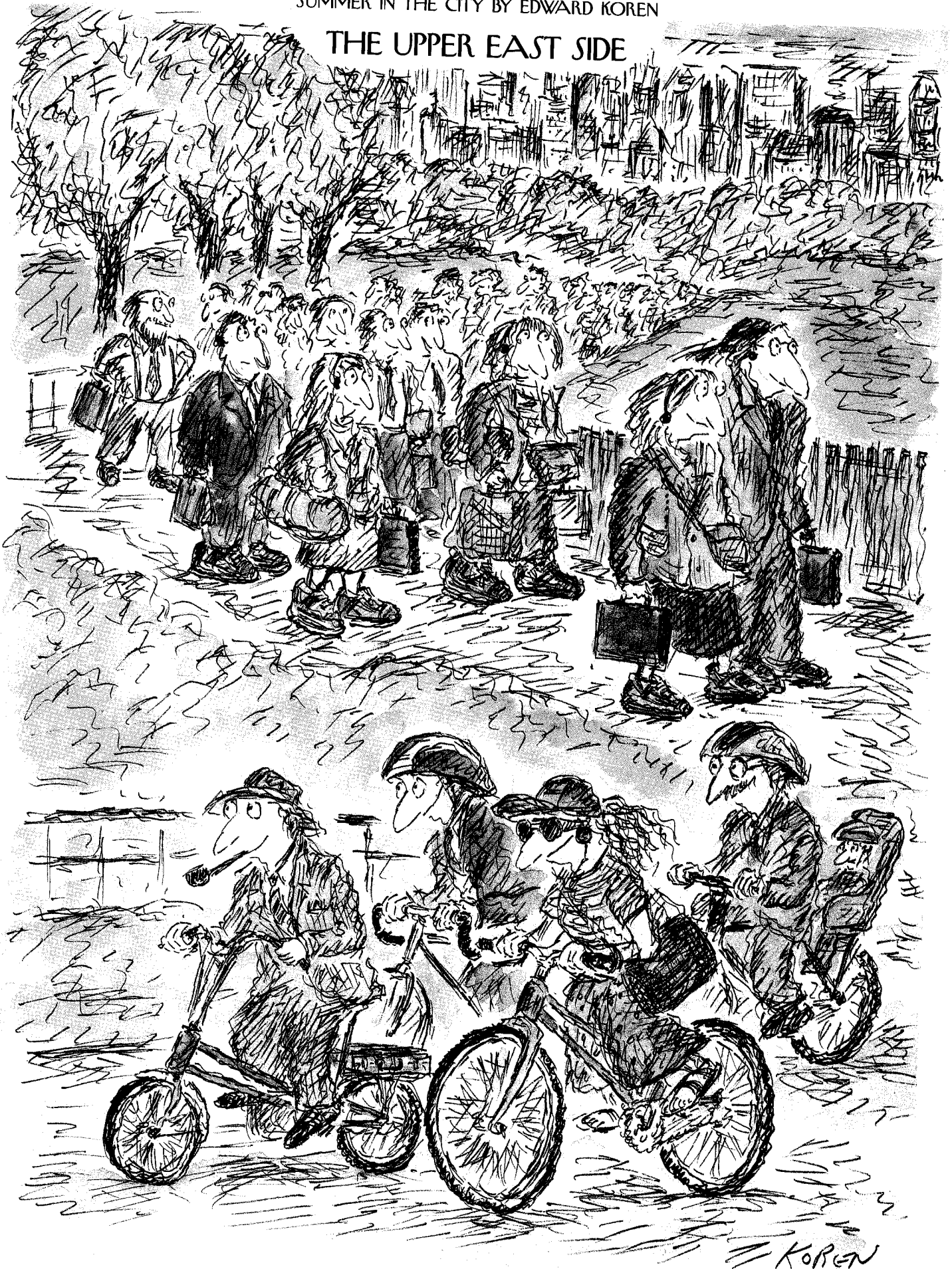
Anne went on to speak pityingly of Hughes and of her disinclination to join the pack of ferreters-out of ugly secrets about him. "But Ted must have dark side. Read his books 'Crow' and 'Gaudete'—they're clues to how he felt. 'Gaudete' especially. Women are demon spirits in the poem. They're Racine's Phèdre. He felt he was being devoured. Ted was in the wilderness for ten years. I think he was, in a way, mad during this period. He is certainly not mad now. I am not an alcoholic now."

The short winter afternoon was waning, and I followed Anne into the kitchen to help prepare dinner. She had already made some of the elements of a lasagna; grating the cheese, chopping the mushrooms, and assembling the parts were still to be done. We worked together and continued to talk. Suddenly, in a somewhat desperate voice, Anne asked if I would mind going and reading in the other room. She needed to be alone so she could concentrate on her cooking. She couldn't both talk and cook.

I said "Of course" and withdrew. In the parlor next to the kitchen, I leafed through a pile of correspondence that Anne had assembled for me. Most of the letters were between Anne and Olwyn, but there were also a few from Peter Davison; from Anne's husband, Peter Lucas; and from Ted Hughes. The letters from Hughes immediately drew me, as if they were the electrically attractive man himself. As I looked at the pages of dense, single-spaced typing, punctuated by x-ings-out and penned-in corrections, I had a nostalgic feeling. The clotted, irregular, unrepentantly messy pages brought back the letters we used to write one another in the nineteen-fifties and sixties on our manual Olivettis and Smith Coronas, so different from the marmoreally cool and smooth letters young people write one another today on their Macintoshes and I.B.M.s. Reading the letter giving Hughes's response to the chapters Anne had sent him of her short biography, I felt my identification with its typing swell into a feeling of intense

SUMMER IN THE CITY BY EDWARD KOREN

THE UPPER EAST SIDE



sympathy and affection for the writer. Other letters of Hughes's that have come my way have had the same effect, and I gather that I am not alone in this reaction; other people have spoken to me with awe of Hughes's letters. Someday, when they are published, critics will wrestle with the question of what gives them their peculiar power, why they are so deeply, mysteriously moving.

Anne, having put the lasagna in the oven, rejoined me and again took up the subject of the collaboration with Olwyn. "At first, I liked Olwyn," she said. "I didn't dislike her until she began treating me as if I were a recalcitrant sixth former: 'Why aren't you doing the homework I assigned you?' I'm not a very forceful character myself. But I am very, very stubborn when it comes to being pushed around in something I think I can do. When I came back from Indiana, I said, 'Look, Olwyn, really now, thank you, but I want to work on my own.' She saw it as an absolute insult. She was taken completely aback when this nice, gentle girl she had been having weekly lunches with, and who had been so amenable and completely at her feet, suddenly became uppity. My husband had warned me, 'If you try to break off with her now, she won't let you.' He was right. I had fallen into a trap. There was no way out. 'Bitter Fame' would have been an extremely good book if I had been able to follow my own bent. It was very painful to be interfered with at every turn. I really don't know why I published the book. My husband thinks I shouldn't have." She paused, and then asked me, "What do you think? Should I have published it?"

I didn't know what to say. I finally said that I had liked the book and that of course she should have published it. But I added that I thought the conditions under which it had been produced were horrendous, and that not every writer would have been able to accept them. Anne said quickly that she knew the conditions were unacceptable, but financial necessity had forced her to accept them. She was poor and could not pay back her advance. She could also not accept the idea of four years of work going for naught.

Peter Lucas came home and joined the conversation. He is an old "Bitter Fame" hand, who had lived through all the bad years of the book with Anne, and had even intervened a few times with let-

ters to Olwyn and Peter Davison. He is a bearish, bearded, gray-haired, young-looking, very pleasant man, who has a lawyer's leashed intellect, and who plays the role of sensible, protective husband to Anne's nervous artist. They are an affectionate couple, very amiable with each other. (Anne and Peter had met and fallen in love twenty years earlier but had not come together then.) He brought out wine, and he and I sat at the kitchen table while Anne moved about finishing the preparations for dinner. She opened the refrigerator door and let out a groan. "I forgot to put the white sauce in the lasagna," she said in a stricken voice. The omission was too late to correct; the lasagna would have to continue baking as it was. When we ate it, half an hour later, it tasted good, but Anne was critical of it and repeatedly apologized for it. As with the publication of "Bitter Fame," she had no choice but to serve it, but she felt it to be an imperfect, compromised thing. I understood her anguish and felt for her.

WHEN I returned to Anne's house the next day, I found her still further transformed from the tense, plainly dressed matron of the University Women's Club. She had a calm and mild air about her, and she was wearing a pair of handsome tweed trousers and an interesting embroidered jacket. With her gleaming light-brown hair and her Virginia Woolf eyes (the glasses had disappeared without explanation), she personified the idea of the timelessly beautiful woman artist. Over lunch, we reminisced about our Michigan days and looked back with rue at the way things were for young American women college graduates in the nineteen-fifties. In a passage in "The Bell Jar" which is like a madeleine for bookish women of my generation, Esther Greenwood says:

My mother kept telling me nobody wanted a plain English major. But an English major who knew shorthand was something else again. Everybody would want her. She would be in demand among all the up-and-coming young men and she would transcribe letter after thrilling letter. The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men. . . . I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters.

Anne's solution to the problem of being a B.A. without shorthand was to go to England. "I was very Anglophile," she said. "I had read Jane Austen and Charles Dickens and Henry James, and I expected England to be the book I had al-

ways wanted to live in. The crudeness of America appalled me. I thought all those crewcutted boys I had to go on dates with were disgusting." But England turned out to be another book altogether. Anne expanded on the theory that, like her, Plath was neither prepared nor cut out for the fast track of English poets' society. "The bohemian world of English poetry would have been antagonistic to Sylvia's tidy puritanism—as it was antagonistic to mine," she said. "In this world, who you went to bed with was not a matter of much importance. Sylvia and I thought we could handle this, and of course we couldn't. Sylvia couldn't handle Ted acting like an English poet. She had always found it uncomfortable. There was some kind of Jamesian morality here. Neither of us was a natural bohemian, though I think I made a bigger stab at being one than Sylvia did." Anne went on, with her moving candor, to speak of the difficulties that attended her own literary maturation. "I think I told you, I used to drink a lot, the way women did. I couldn't get through the evening without quite a lot of drink. I had to break myself of that. I think Sylvia took up suicide the way I took up drink. It was something that bit at you. I have thought, Suppose you hadn't reached for the whiskey—suppose you had reached for the gas tap? Almost every writer I know has severe depressions."

"It's part of the work."

"Yes. It's when you know you're not fulfilling yourself, when you know you're letting yourself down. To be an artist, you have to grant a certain authority to yourself. The critical world wants to deprive you of this authority. A lot of critics—perhaps because they're failed artists themselves—love nothing so much as shooting down writers who *are* authentic artists. And if you're having a bad time in your life in order to produce this art the pain can produce an intolerable strain—which can come out as alcoholism or deep depression, or both. It's a most painful thing. I've never contemplated suicide, but there have been years in my life when I wished I were dead—years, anyway, when I thought the best part of me *was* dead."

"When was this?"

"At various times. One time was at the end of my first marriage. It was quite clear that I was a terrible wife for a businessman, and that I was never going to

make it in the circles my husband thought it was important to move in. I had to summon a lot of energy to say that we had to be divorced. Neither of us had another partner. After that, I tended to have affairs with poets. Somebody would think I was a good poet and could be published, and I would go way up. Anyone who came along and told me that what I was writing was important—I loved him and went off with him. I think Sylvia would have left Ted if someone had come along who she thought was better for her poetry than Ted. I know this because I left my husband to live with Philip Hobsbaum when I was writing ‘Correspondences.’ Philip was a poet. He was enormously helpful to me. I needed someone with whom I could talk about poetry all the time. Creating the book was something that was much bigger to me than my family.” In her autobiography Anne had written:

That winter I left Mark and the two boys in the care of a housekeeper and went to live with Philip Hobsbaum. Philip was as generous to the Glaswegian poets in those days as he had been, in former years, to the young Irish poets in Belfast. Seamus Heaney, for instance, was one of his discoveries. Like Mark, Philip was fond of children, and our living arrangements, though unconventional, were not uncivilized.

Now Anne said, “That kind of arrangement wasn’t unusual in the seventies; many people were leaving husbands or wives and living with other people, and everyone was being very civilized about it. I think we had this notion that once we were adults we could live with whomever we wanted to, but we still had responsibilities toward children. I think we all subscribed to a rather crazy sense of what was possible for a human being to do. I now look back on it all, I must say, in horror. It was not a happy time. But I did finish ‘Correspondences.’” Anne went on to say that she had been hurt by the indifference with which “Correspondences” was met. “It came out about the time that Ted’s ‘Crow’ came out. ‘Crow’ was a grand success, and no one paid any attention to ‘Correspondences.’” The defeated note had crept back into her voice.

Peter Lucas, who had tactfully disappeared so that Anne and I could be alone, returned, and he and Anne drove me to the station. He joined our concluding conversation about “Bitter Fame”—again in a grimly knowledgeable way, as a sort of fellow-survivor (barely) of a catastro-



“What you’re doing is art, too—everything we do is art!”

phe. When we said goodbye, I felt a pang of affection and pity for this pair of decent and honorable people who had somehow strayed into a nightmare. Yet I was also conscious of a somewhat impatient unasked question: Why, when Anne, like her namesake in “Persuasion,” was finally safely reunited with her Wentworth, had she had to go and take up with Olwyn, yet another “other man”?

On the train back to London, I took out the packet of letters Anne had given me, and read through the correspondence between Anne and Olwyn in the years 1986 through 1989. I read with rapt fascination. I was being made privy to a lovers’ quarrel. The letters rang with accusations, recriminations, resentments, grievances, threats, insults, shows of pitableness, rage, petulance, contempt, injured pride—the whole repertoire of bad

feeling that people who have got under each other’s skin trot out and fling at each other like buckets of filthy water. The letters were abashingly real. They brought the story that Anne and Olwyn had told me back to its emotional source. I felt like the possessor of a great prize—the prize that the narrator of “The Aspern Papers” goes to such extreme lengths to try to get. Letters are the great fixative of experience. Time erodes feeling. Time creates indifference. Letters prove to us that we once cared. They are the fossils of feeling. This is why biographers prize them so: they are biography’s only conduit to unmediated experience. Everything else the biographer touches is stale, hashed over, told and retold, dubious, unauthentic, suspect.

Leafing through the Olwyn-Anne correspondence, I have the sense of being in

the company of an old and all too familiar presence, and suddenly, in a flash of intuitive knowledge, I know what it is. I recognize Olwyn as a personification of the force—sometimes called the resistance—that can keep the writer from writing. She is the voice that whispers in your ear and tells you to put down your pen before she knocks it out of your hand. In letter after letter she tells Anne the withering things that writers tell themselves as they try to write. Seen as a dialogue between the writer's inner voices—the one abusive and scornful, the other defensive and plaintive—the Olwyn-Anne correspondence becomes something more than the trace of a quarrel between two women who should never have worked together. In a typical letter (of August 24, 1987) Olwyn says:

Even with the written accounts by various people I've been supplying you with, the details I've rooted out, and so on, I've often been surprised by your lack of grasp of what they represented as biographical material and your reluctance to put them to use. . . . It has been as though you've been hoping only that there isn't any *more* stuff to evaluate, and that the book will be finished SOON. . . . Now as you know I've been accepting all this and more with good grace—with a lot of sympathy for your moments of misery and no little guilt that I got you into this. . . . I've been thinking "Poor Anne," and redoubling my efforts and the hours and hours of phoning, correspondence, notes, searching through letters, journals and the rest. . . .

Lately, though, I've been thinking not "Poor Anne" but "Poor Me" (and even "Damn Fool Me"). . . . And such phone calls as I've had with Peter Davison have bothered me. It's almost as though he saw his role as defending you from me. I told him at one point I was sending you more notes and he actually said "Leave her alone with her writing, you'll drive the poor woman mad!" . . . He clearly had no conception of the method of work and was totally unaware that much of what you were "writing" sprang directly from the notes . . . and hints (as I've also wasted a great deal of time being positively Oriental in tact, as straightforward dialogue seemed to upset you) how to interpret, select, and *use* the mass of material you have via me. . . . I've had to *fight* all the way.

Anne, for her part, personifies the writer at bay. She gives voice to the writer's anxiety, resentment, boundless self-pity. She writes Olwyn on December 28, 1987, "Please respect me as the author of this book and cease to persecute me with unpleasant references to my 'vapours.'" And, on February 13, 1988, "I really don't think we have much more to say to each other, so please respect my wish to be left in peace. No letters, no phone calls. You have brought me to the edge of breakdown many times in the past year." And, on March 12th, "As for the motives you attribute to me, you should know enough of my character by this time to realize that, while I detest being bullied, I wholly dislike calumny and slander." And, on May 18, 1989, "A person can take just so much flak, so much of

being pushed into the mud, kicked, insulted, threatened, bullied, bulldozed into submission." But then, astonishingly, near the end of the May 18th letter—a very long one—she writes, "In spite of my bruised feelings, I am grateful to you. All the writings and rewritings on both sides have honed the book down and sharpened its impact. In the end, with Peter Davison, we have produced a fine thing." With the work finally and actually somehow done, Anne can distance herself from the ink-stained kvetch that is her writing ego, and give the resistance its due. Now that she has defeated it, she can be generous. She can acknowledge that without Olwyn's "dissatisfactions and accusations" the work would have been a much poorer thing. On Olwyn's side, the losing side, there is no generosity. Continuing to mutter that she should have got someone else for the job, that she was misled by Anne's nice tweeds, and so on, Olwyn is the emblem of the failure that every successful piece of work also is—the ghost of the impossible ideal that gave it its life and does not survive its development and completion. The Olwyn force wins only when the writer bows to its power and puts down his pen.

ON a gray afternoon, I sat with Al Alvarez in his living room in Hampstead, in a crooked little house on a street that goes down a hill. The room had wooden floors covered with Persian carpets; there were modern paintings and primitive sculptures; and in a window facing the street were flowering cyclamen, narcissi, and African violets. It was a compact, handsome, very agreeable room. Alvarez himself was very agreeable. He was older than I had expected. But everybody was older than I had expected. The characters in the Plath story are all getting on in years. Plath's contemporaries are men and women approaching sixty or just past it. Her mother is in a nursing home. Only Plath remains embalmed in her heroine's youth and angst.

Alvarez brought a tea tray and spoke of Anne Stevenson with chilly dislike. Anne had defended herself against Alvarez's criticisms in a letter



"I'm sorry, sir. That's the children's menu."

published in *The New York Review of Books* of October 26, 1989. She wrote:

My object in writing "Bitter Fame" was to reveal in plain language a Sylvia Plath many of her friends attest to recognizing: a protected, middle-class, American girl of the 1950s, spoiled at home and at school because of her intelligence, exceptional industry and anxiousness to please. The heady idealism, the vanity, the ambition, the competitiveness and underlying self-alienation so voluminously explored in her journals and letters were attitudes I, too, together with many of Plath's contemporaries, unconsciously adopted in our teens and twenties. Most of us have grown up to be more than a little ashamed of the rapacious self-centeredness of our salad days. In "Bitter Fame" I make gentle fun of Plath's youthful absurdities—sympathetically, I think—as Plath herself might have today, had she lived to look back at them.

Alvarez had replied:

I find it hard to believe that Ms. Stevenson is quite as tone-deaf to her own prose as she implies. None of the many snide comments that I quoted in my review of "Bitter Fame" seem to me at all witty and if Ms. Stevenson seriously believes that all she was doing was making fun of Plath's "youthful absurdities" and indulging in "a little levity with regard to the self-importance of any artist," then, in Dorothy Parker's words, "I am Marie of Roumania."

Now, pouring tea into large green square-cut cups, Alvarez said, "Anne Stevenson has done a big number, saying it's all Olwyn's fault—'Olwyn made me write the book,' and so on and so forth—but I think she was a very willing collaborator with Olwyn. She may say, 'Olwyn pushed me into it,' but I don't think she needed a lot of pushing. I think she went along with it quite willingly." He then reiterated the theory set forth by the *TLS* reviewer who had wounded Anne so deeply by charging her with envy of Plath. "I thought there was a huge element of unconscious envy in 'Bitter Fame,'" he said: a minor poet's envy of a major poet. I asked if he had read "Correspondences," and he said he hadn't but had been unimpressed by the poems of Anne's that he had read. "I don't claim to be an expert on her work. She may have written some very good poems, but I feel she's a kind of pale figure and was probably corrupted by Olwyn and Ted *because* she was a pale figure."

He went on to speak with grim satisfaction of his decisive role in the discrediting of "Bitter Fame." "Everything that we've ever heard about female bitchiness—a kind of permanent pressure to cut people down to size—seemed to me

to be embodied in that book. But until I wrote my review nobody had noticed it. John Updike, who is no one's fool, had done a sort of puff for the book."

"So your review started a reappraisal?"
"I'm sure it did."

When the conversation turned to Alvarez's memoir of Plath, he said, "I wrote it in the late sixties, which was quite soon after the event, and I felt, maybe misguidedly, that it wasn't anybody's bloody business what had happened between Ted and Sylvia. I knew far more than I was prepared to say then. I didn't say, for instance, that when Ted left Sylvia he came and stayed with me in the studio I used to have near here. I'm convinced that when Sylvia started dropping in on me there, it was to sniff around the lair where Ted had been. She also came because she knew I liked her poetry, and she knew I could *read* her poetry. I was a poet myself at the time, and I was a critic who took Sylvia very seriously. What you have to realize is that in those days the stuff she was writing was in no way generally accepted. People were hardly falling over themselves to publish her poems. People didn't see what she was getting at, or didn't like what they saw."

"You were an exception."

"Sure. I don't want to, as it were, promote my case. But she knew I could read those poems and listen to them."

In his review of "Bitter Fame" Alvarez had also made a point of his disinclination to publicly pry into the Plath-Hughes marriage, writing, "I myself have always believed, as Robert Graves wrote of another tragic couple, 'The hazards of their love-bed / Were none of our damn business.'" But now, under the lowering influence of a journalist's visit, he grew indiscreet. "The thing about Ted is that he is a terrifically attractive man," he said. "Before my second marriage, I had an Australian girl, who knew Ted, and she told me that when she first set eyes on him her knees went weak. And I knew another woman, a psychoanalyst, who had such a strong reaction when she first met Ted—she told me this many years later—that she actually went to the bathroom and vomited. Ted kind of went through swaths of women, like a guy harvesting corn. Sylvia must have known that. Women really did hang around

him. Of course, I don't know what happened between Ted and Sylvia, but I do know, from my own experience, that one of the things that happen in a bad marriage is that people fuck around a lot. And it's intolerable—intolerable for both."

"Wasn't that a period of bad marriages?" I said.

"Yes. Exactly. It was the period of Albee's 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' It was the period of Berryman's poem 'New Year's Eve'—which, I suspect, was about one of Hannah Arendt's New Year's Eve parties. They were marvellous parties. Did you ever go? I went to a couple. I always saw Berryman there. His poem

has a marvellous line: 'Somebody slapped somebody's second wife somewhere.'"

"It brings back the time," I said.

"Doesn't it!"

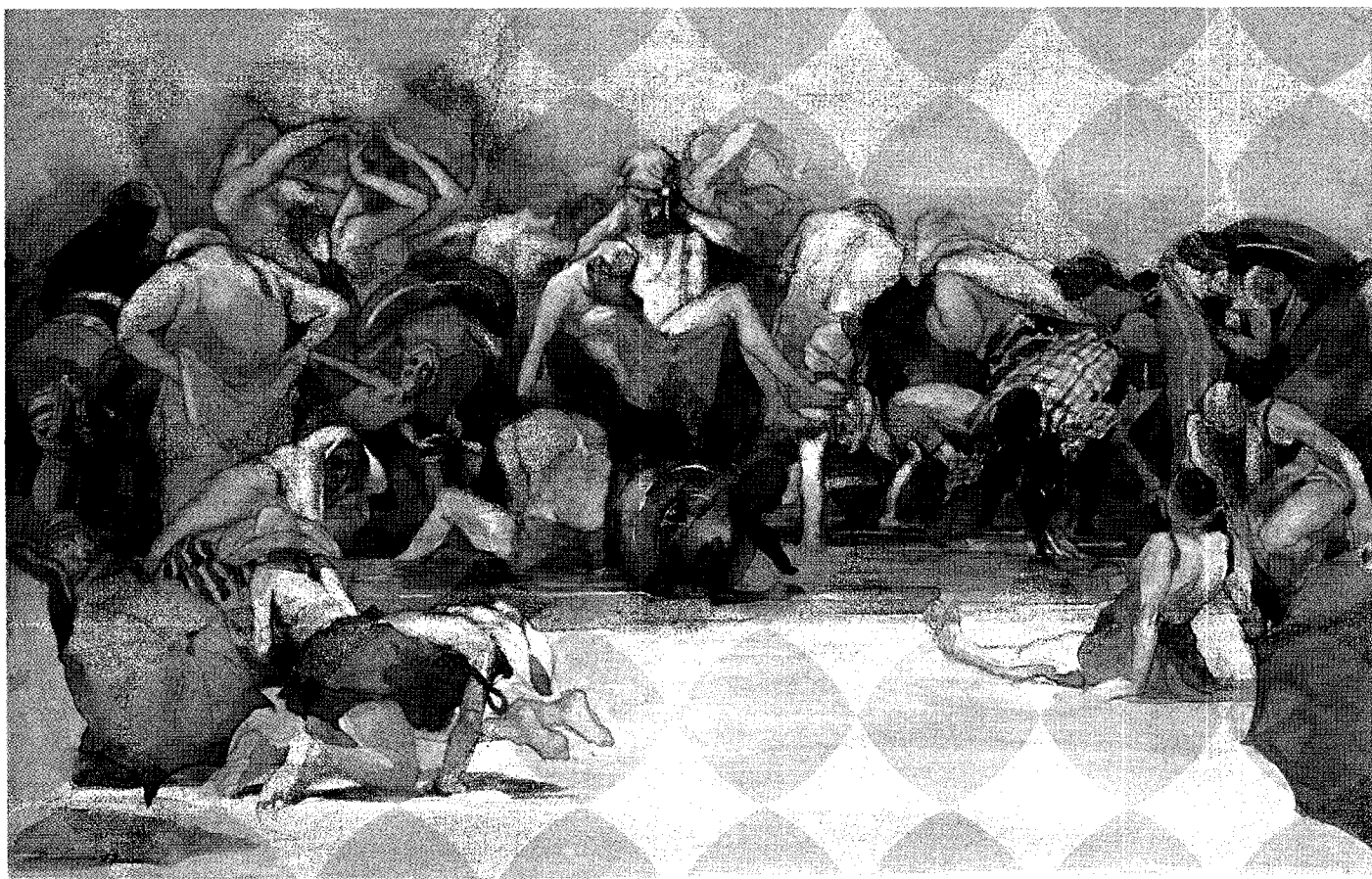
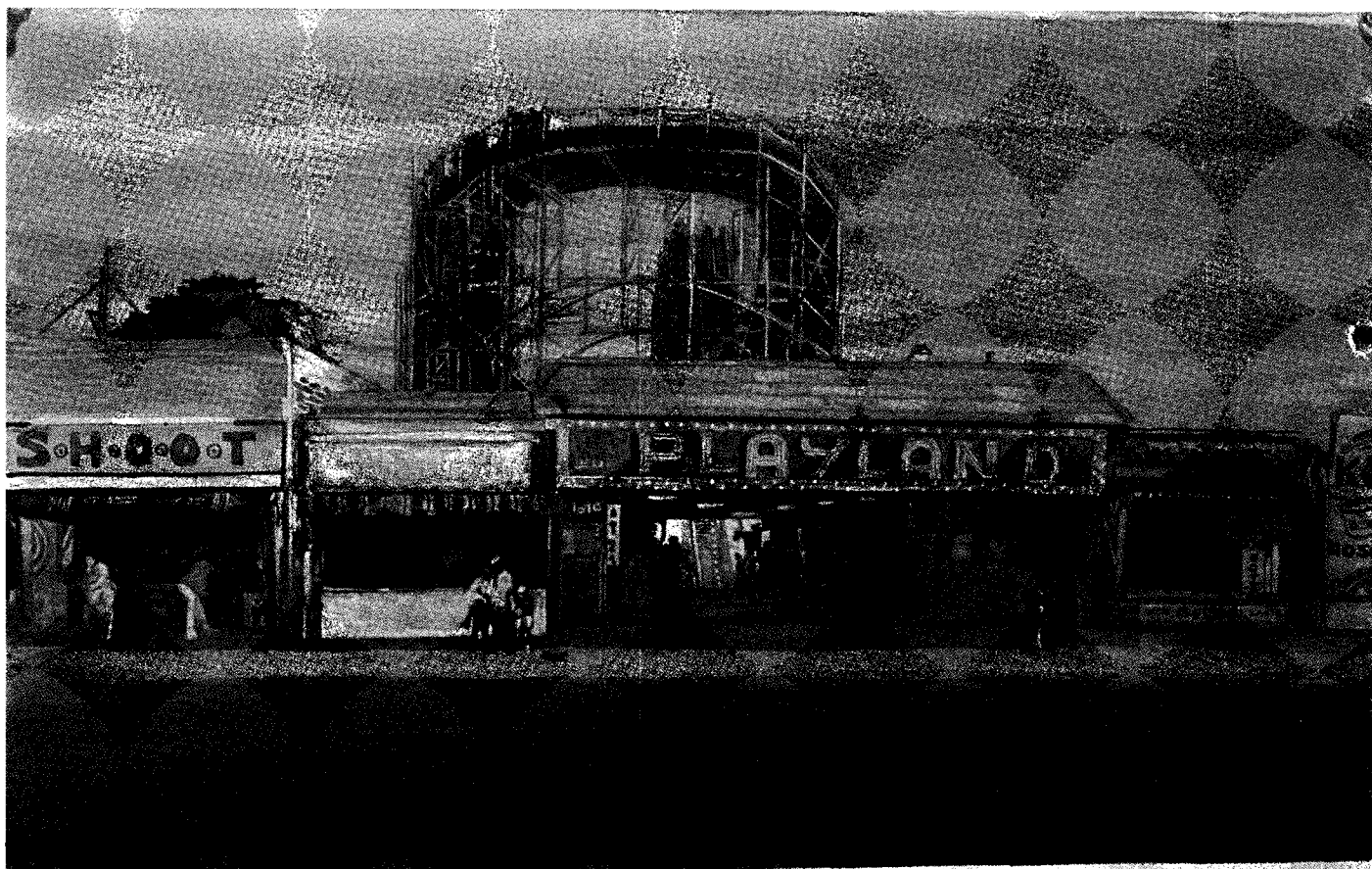
Alvarez turned to his own relationship with Plath in the fall of 1962 and spelled out what he had left vague in the memoir. There, to account for his rejection of her, he had murmured about "responsibilities I didn't want." Now he confessed that it was Plath herself he didn't want. At the time Plath began visiting him in his studio, another woman entered his life—the woman who was to become his second wife—and he chose her over Plath. "What remains, of course, is a great sense of guilt," he said.

"The 'what if,' " I said.

"The 'what if.' And yet 'what if' doesn't apply here," Alvarez said, "because Sylvia just wasn't my style—she wasn't my physical type. She was a big girl with a long face. She had wonderful eyes, marvellous live eyes, and she was so damn clever and so full of feeling. I loved her talent and her passion for poetry. I loved her the way I love M"—here Alvarez mentioned a woman we both know. "M is so clever, so full of life and so on. Do you see what I mean? That's what I felt about Sylvia. Do you see what I'm getting at?"

In his review of "Bitter Fame" Alvarez, discussing the feminist vision of Plath as "a great woman artist who was abused, put upon, and betrayed by men," had written, "In every respect this is the crudest sentimentality, and I suspect Plath, who liked men and trusted them, would not have appreciated it. . . . 'Bitter Fame' demonstrates in great detail that,







SUMMER IN THE CITY
BY DAVID LEVINE

CONEY ISLAND

PAINTING beach scenes that lovingly celebrate Coney Island in rich, muted colors is the other half of David Levine's life as an artist. Every August, when *The New York Review of Books* goes on vacation and he's not needed as a devastating pen-and-ink caricaturist, he spends thirty days with his portable stool, paintbox, pencil, and water cup on a small stretch of the beach just in front of the boardwalk. Levine, who says that the seaside probably hasn't changed much during the past five thousand years ("People get undressed, and they go into the water"), sometimes takes two or three years to complete a painting; there is always so much he's noticing for the first time: the color of a sun-faded bathing suit; the shrug of an old lady's shoulder; a struggle for enough open sand to spread out a towel, which suddenly reminds him of a Rubens battle scene.

The backdrop keeps changing—in the past five years, the Thunderbolt roller coaster has been abandoned, and some of the penny arcades have been shuttered—but the people are still there: "My Brooklyn neighbors, beautiful, hardworking, worthwhile people. The people nobody paints." —TONY HISS



both living and dead, Plath had a great deal more to fear from her own sex than from any man." But as he spoke of Plath now (and of M) he cast doubt on his words. Behind the smiling collegial face I showed to Alvarez—whose charm and warmth and wit I responded to—I scowled at his condescension. Surely the "big girl with a long face" had more to fear from men. We know from "The Journals" and "Letters Home," and infer from the autobiographical "Bell Jar," that Plath suffered cruel indignities at the hands of men. In the figure of Buddy Willard she created a lasting monument to an especially noxious type of self-satisfied jerk that flourished in America in the forties and fifties. Alvarez, of course, is no Buddy Willard. His words were heedlessly uttered, no doubt the product of the conversation's retrospective pull—the words of a kind of revenant. And, in all fairness to Alvarez, I should say that Plath isn't my style, either. All the photographs of her disappoint me. Over the years of the photographic archive, she changes, gradually losing the blond, dark-lipsticked blandness of her college period and the crisp, American housewifeliness of Alvarez's memoir. But of her "Ariel" persona—queen, priestess, magician's girl, red-haired woman who eats men like air, woman in white, woman in love, earth mother, moon goddess—there is no trace in the photographs. The fault may be with photography—some people never really appear in their photographs. Or it may be that Plath was only on the verge of showing herself in photographs when she died, her "true self" not yet available to the camera's dumb gaze.

At the end of the visit, I asked Alvarez about the incident of the withdrawal of the second half of his memoir from the *Observer*. He said, "When Ted wrote and said the memoir was an invasion of privacy, I didn't put up any sort of fight about publishing the second half. If it upset him that much, I thought O.K." He suggested that I go to the British Library and read the correspondence between him and Hughes about the incident—it is part of an archive of personal papers Alvarez sold to the library—and a few months later I did so. As I sat in the library's manuscript division reading the correspondence, I recognized the beginnings of the sensations I had felt in Anne Stevenson's house while reading Ted Hughes's letters. Hughes is Vronsky to

Plath's Anna. He is the man on the train with the unbearable toothache. When he writes about Plath, he renders all the other writings about her crude and trivial. He writes with brilliant, exasperated intelligence and a kind of Chekhovian largeheartedness and melancholy.

In the first of two letters about the "Savage God" memoir—several pages of small, spiked handwriting—Hughes tells Alvarez that he has done something unspeakable in making public the details of Plath's suicide. "It is humiliating to me and to her mother and brother to have her last days exhumed in this way, as you do in your memoir, for classroom discussion," he writes, and goes on:

You have supplied details and interpretations in a form that is now being taken as the official text. I thought you were sensitive to this sort of atmospheric persecution, because it is a sort of persecution. It was enough and too much before. Nobody could have written that scenario of her suicide but you (or me), and I cannot see how you persuaded yourself it was necessary. I would like to know what purpose you think it's going to serve. You kept saying you would show me what you were writing about her—why didn't you? For you, it was something you wrote, no doubt against great inner resistance, for your readers, it's five interesting minutes, but for us it is permanent dynamite.

Hughes then moves on from the atmospheric to the particular harm he feels Alvarez has done:

For you, she is a topic of intellectual discussion, a poetic, existential phenomenon. . . . But for F. and N. [Frieda and Nicholas Hughes, then eleven and nine], she is the absolute centerpin—they have made her very important, the more so because of her obvious absence. Throughout the mess I've been making of replacing her these last years, their image of her—of what she did and was—is going to decide their lives. . . . Before your details, it was vague, it was a mystery. But now you have defined the whole thing, and handed it to the public. In a real way, you have robbed them of her death, of any natural way of dealing with her death. This will add up through every year they live. For you and everybody else, it is fading fast—you've solved the mystery of *exactly what happened, and how*. (You've given a version, anyway.) But for F. and N., it has not yet properly begun; the presiding fact of their future will only really dawn on them when somehow they meet your memoir. . . .

They had enough of the facts and the truths living in the mausoleum Sylvia left for them. What your memoir supplies is not just facts—(so few of the facts—so many fictions) and mere speculations trying to be facts—but poison. Poison is no less poison for being a fact.

Hughes subsides into a calmer, though bitter, discussion of the situation of Plath's survivors, but then, in a kind

of second wind of fury at Alvarez, he writes:

Another thing. Not even temporary insanity would explain your completely false remarks implying that there was some sort of artistic jealousy between Sylvia and me. . . . You saw little enough of us. Both of us regarded you as a friend, not a *Daily Mirror* TV keyhole, rat-hole journalist snoop, guaranteed to distort every observation and plaster us with these know-all pseudo-psychological theories, as if we were relics dug up from 10,000 B.C. Of our marriage you know nothing. . . . It is infuriating for me to see my private experiences and feelings re-invented for me, in that crude, bland, unanswerable way, and interpreted and published as official history—as if I were a picture on a wall or some prisoner in Siberia. And to see her used in the same way.

Alvarez wrote back a letter full of sense and reasonableness—a very good letter, in the ordinary course of things. But in the obliterating shadow of Hughes's emotional rhetoric it seems flat and inadequate. "You know perfectly well that the memoir is not a piece of sensationalism," Alvarez begins, and he goes on:

It was written with great care and as a tribute to Sylvia—among other reasons, to lay some of the wild fantasies which are current about her death, fantasies which I imagine you must have heard of more than I. . . . I have not intruded into your marriage or made public any intimate details about it. They did not seem to me to have anything to do with what I was writing about, or to be anybody's business. So I kept them out, although, obviously, I knew about it, and, equally obviously, Sylvia talked about it at times. Even Olwyn phoned me when she read the memoir . . . to say she liked it and thought it was tactful. She corrected me only on a couple of details. . . .

As for the children, God knows that is an appallingly difficult thing. But I would have thought it better for them eventually to see this [memoir], which is at least written with some kind of consideration and feeling for their mother, rather than a cloud of vague and malicious rumors. . . . I did not know you hadn't yet told them about it, but there is no way in which they won't eventually find out. I would have thought the pop distortions going around would be a great deal more harmful.

I will do what I can about the *Observer*. . . . I have phoned them already.

For the last 10 years or more, I have taken a lot of trouble to get both your poetry and Sylvia's read with understanding and a proper respect. I have done so not because you are friends of mine but because I think you the most gifted poets of your generation. Sylvia knew this, and knew I understood in some way what she was trying to do. That, presumably, is why she came to me with her poems after the separation. To imagine now that I am simply cashing in on her death or making a glib intellectual point is a complete distortion of everything I have written, both here and before. I am sorry you should choose to take it that way.

Hughes's reply is a very long typewrit-

ten letter—five and a half single-spaced pages. Alvarez has prodded him to an even deeper level of anger:

You say I know perfectly well the memoir is not a piece of sensationalism. Easily said. I don't know that at all—and neither do you. . . . Sylvia now goes through the detailed, point-by-point death of a public sacrifice. Her poems provided the vocal part for that sort of show. Your account, in apparently documentary style, of how she lived up to her outcry inevitably completes and concludes the performance. Now there actually is a body. The cries drew the crowd, but they came not to hear more cries—they came to see the body. Now they have it—they can smell its hair and its death. You present in the flesh what the death cries were working up to. The public isn't really interested in death cries unless they guarantee a dead body, a slow painful death, with as many signals as possible of what it is feeling like. And you present that, the thing the public really wants and needs—the absolutely convincing finalised official visible gruelling death. . . .

Whether you thought of it or not, to a sensation-watching and half-hysterical congregation (which her followers now are), your article is the ultimate sensational desired event. Only one thing could go further: that she reappear and go through the whole thing again, correcting all errors of report, on TV—stopping at intervals to answer interviewers' questions, giving her feelings and intentions. . . .

You say your article was written with care, but with what sort of care? I see only care of a very narrow technical sort—care to get the tone right and keep it right, and I can believe that was difficult, and depressing too. . . . Your care was like the care of a witness in court—this is all I know, my lord, I can't say any more than the way it appeared to me, etc.—and if you had made it clear that that is what you were presenting, at least a reader would know how to place your remarks, just how much credibility they carried. But even that would be forgetting the great point of care that really decides the whole thing—care about whether this whole project wasn't a terribly wrong thing to do at all, unethical and insensitive in every way, a wrong thing to do with the confidences of a friendship, a wrong thing to do with a keyhole view of an event that went out of everybody's grasp. . . .

How can you call it a tribute to her—to make a public spectacle of the one thing she ought to be allowed to keep to herself if nothing else—her infinitely humiliating private killing of herself. . . .

As for your article laying the wild fantasies, you know the opposite is much more likely. Before this, the fantasies were hot air, blowing each other away as fast as they were invented, all of them perfectly weightless. . . . All that nonsense is just rumor eating rumor. But now you have provided what seems to be substance, real fact and foundation—the story from one who was in the room. Between her writings and your article is a whole new world of hypothesis. And the commercial and career need for articles and theses and class material will make sure that world gets overpopulated, and your facts get turned into literary historic monuments. Nobody knows better than you that your article will be read with more interest than the

poems ever were, and will be used more by the wretched millions who have to find something to say in their papers. The only difference in the fantasies now will be that they will be ten times as confident in their outrageousness.

At this point in Hughes's letter, I began to feel what I had felt in another archive—in the Smith College Library's Rare Book Room, where many of Plath's typescripts and manuscripts are deposited, and where I was perusing the first draft of her poem "The Rabbit Catcher," of 1962. On the first page of the draft and on a part of the second page, the poem is unrecognizable—disconnected lines, most of them scratched out. There is the sense of a mind stirred by something, a mind activated and excited but not able to move forward, like a car spinning its wheels in a rut, unable to get a purchase. Suddenly the car surges forward. "It was a place of force," Plath writes, and the rest of the poem follows the well-known first line essentially as we know it. The change from going nowhere to going somewhere happens so quickly that the reader of the draft is stunned, and all the more moved. In the middle of the letter to Alvarez, Hughes arrives at a moment that is like finding solid ground beneath his wheels. What has come before has been a kind of preamble—the trace of a mind repetitively whirling and straining toward the idea that finally breaks through. Hughes says:

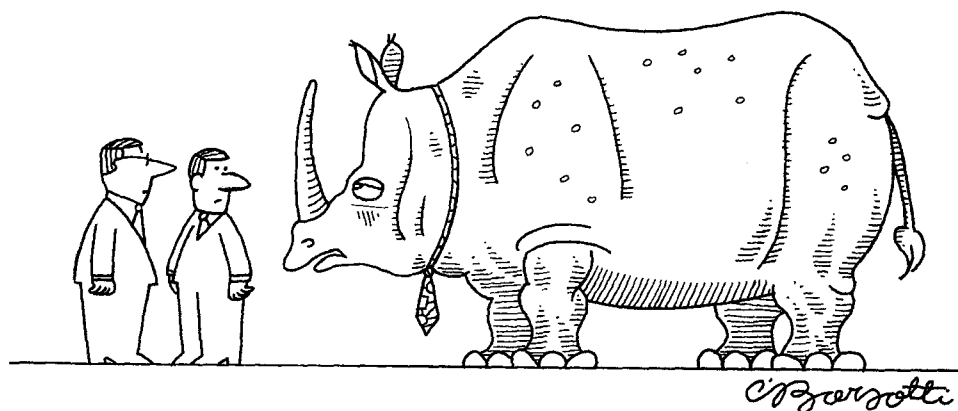
You didn't distinguish between two completely different kinds of writing. . . . between a subjective work that was trying to reach an artistic form using a real event as its basis, and a documentary work that professes to present anything except errors—everything very purely told and impersonal—of some event that did really happen and is still an active part of some lives.

Hughes goes relentlessly on with his exhortation of Alvarez and with his analy-

sis of the fundamental moral problem of journalism and of biography that involves living people:

If your intentions had been documentary [in] style, if your respect had been for what really happened, and the way things really went, you would have asked me to be co-author. And if I'd refused to cooperate, as I certainly would, you would have said, "O.K., that's one piece that can't be written." You would have done that unless you were keener to get your private account published than to get the fullest account possible and to do the human and decent thing at the same time. . . . The egoistic journalist in you . . . the publish-and-be-damned journalist (you publish and let the others be damned), it just fouled you up, it betrayed you and, incidentally, us. . . . It's only by seeing how the U.S.-ethos journalist in you rationalised you out of your real heart and your real imagination that I can understand how that piece came to appear, and how what began by being written in a sacred way by one part of you, as a private, personal document, was grabbed and sold by the other part, sucked out into the greedy demand of that empty public.

The former friends did not speak for many years. They finally shook hands and mended the quarrel at a memorial service for Robert Lowell, at which both read Lowell poems. There has been brief, cordial, cursory correspondence between the two men since, and one near-meeting. "As I remember," Alvarez told me, "I was terribly hurt by Ted's letters, because, one, I had assumed he was a good friend and, two, he knew as well as I that I had bent over backward, almost—but not quite—to the level of falsifying the evidence, to keep the business of their marriage breakup out of my account. My impression of those letters, which I don't remember much of—I kind of skimmed them before giving them to the British Library—was that he'd gone kind of barmy, and I suspect that what was driving him crazy was the realization that,



"Don't say a word—my daughter gave me this tie."

however tactfully handled, this was public-domain stuff. The death had kind of put her into public domain, do you see what I mean?"

ALVAREZ had suggested that I go speak to Elizabeth Sigmund, and a few days later I was on a train to Cornwall, where she lives, with her third husband, William. The journey was arduous. The snowstorm was over, but its effects were still being felt by the delicate British railway system, and I arrived three hours late. William Sigmund was waiting for me at the station and seemed unexcited by the delay. He is a placid, bearded man in his forties, and, driving to his house, he talked about the work against chemical and biological warfare that he and Elizabeth have been engaged in for the last twenty years; a foundation funds it.

Elizabeth Compton (as she was then) was Plath's great friend in Devon. She knew Plath for only a year, but because it was the last year of Plath's life—the period of the breakup of the marriage and the writing of the "Ariel" poems—her testimony has assumed enormous weight and significance in the Plath legend. She is the kind of witness the dead crave, the person who speaks only well of them. In the memoir of Plath that she published in 1976 she renders her friend as an entirely remarkable, lovable, deliciously interesting, and infinitely touching person. At the end of the famous set piece ("My milk has dried up. . . . Ted . . . has become a *little* man"), she writes that Plath spent the night on the sofa in her living room, and when she came down the next morning she found Plath "bending over a box containing a cat and her new kittens." She adds, "I can see her now, wearing a pink, woolly dressing gown with a long, brown plait of hair falling into the box, turning her head and saying, 'I never saw anything so small and new and vulnerable. They are blind.' What could I do to protect and help this amazing person?"

If Elizabeth personified the entirely loving and uncritical friend, she also fulfilled the unreasonable demand we make on confidants during times of domestic discord: that they take our side completely, share our bruised feelings, and adopt our anger toward the person who has injured us as if they had been injured

themselves. Elizabeth evidently never stopped blaming Hughes as she loyally blamed him in the summer of 1962. As for Olwyn, Elizabeth writes in her memoir:

The most difficult person in Ted's family was his sister Olwyn, who feared and resented Sylvia's talent and beauty, as well as her relationship with Ted. Sylvia felt this terrible jealousy deeply, and recognized an insurmountable anger. She often told me that Olwyn hated her, resented her position as another daughter in the family. When I met Olwyn after Sylvia's death, I felt that she had understated Olwyn's attitude; it was one which I found hard to tolerate even at second hand.

"I tried to explain to Sylvia the terrible, crushing class system in this country," she continues, "and how people like the Hugheses suffered from it in ways which would be hard for an American college girl to understand. I asked her if she didn't think that, somewhere, Ted had a feeling of inferiority. Her answer was a bitterly scornful laugh. 'Ted has lunched with the Duke of Edinburgh,' she said, which of course was no answer at all."

We arrived at the house, a small cottage deep in the country. I found Elizabeth, a portly woman in a black dress, with a flowered shawl over her shoulders, lying on a sofa in the middle of a small, low-ceilinged room with a large stone fireplace. She was, like Alvarez, older than I had expected, but what gave me a chill was the sight of her swollen feet stretched out on the sofa. On the telephone, explaining why she could not offer me lunch, she had told me she was suffering from a bad bout of arthritis and

could not get around, but only now did I grasp how incapacitated she was. Still, she greeted me with a laughing reference to herself as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and began to

chatter in a way calculated to charm and amuse rather than to invite pity. I could see why Plath would have been attracted to this vivacious woman. William brought a pot of tea and a plate of cookies made from blameless natural ingredients. He then retired to his office, a room filled with computer equipment and a photocopier. Elizabeth settled the shawl around her shoulders and told me stories about Plath and Hughes and Olwyn that I had already read in her memoir and in Butscher's biography, along with stories that were new to me but had taken on the

subtly tainted character of stories told too many times. One of these was an account of a visit Elizabeth had paid to the flat on Fitzroy Road shortly after Plath's death: "Ted was out, and there was a little nanny there looking after the children, and she told me that Nick wouldn't eat anymore. He had been very greedy—like Sylvia, he loved food—but now he wouldn't eat, and he was absolutely silent. We talked for a while and then I asked 'Is Ted coming back?' and she said in an embarrassed way, 'Yes, but *she's* here, you know.' And I said 'Who's "she"?' and the girl said, 'Mrs. Wevill,' and I said 'Living here?' and she said, 'Oh, yes.' Then Ted came back—I heard Assia go up the stairs to the bedroom—and he looked absolutely shattered. He looked at me and just said my name, and then he went into the other room and fetched a copy of 'The Bell Jar.' He was almost in tears. He said, 'This is for you—you haven't seen it,' and I said, 'Yes, thank you.' It was awful. The emotions were so powerful and so awful. And then he said—I know he didn't mean it—'It doesn't fall to many men to murder a genius.' And I thought, Poor man! How is he going to survive? We were standing in the kitchen, and he was boiling a kettle on the cooker—the one where she had gassed herself."

Stories like this regularly fill biographies and are taken to be true, because they cannot be disproved. In all the biographies of Plath—even in the carefully vetted "Bitter Fame"—impressions and recollections of Hughes by contemporary witnesses are accorded the status of historical fact. One can imagine how Hughes must feel when he picks up one of these books and reads what someone noticed about him, or thought about him, or thought he heard him say, thirty years ago. Memory is notoriously unreliable; when it is intertwined with ill will, it may become monstrously unreliable.

Elizabeth turned from Ted to Olwyn. "I didn't meet her until Sylvia was dead, when she came to Court Green to live with Ted and the children," she said. "I got to know her very well. We played poker together. It was very alarming when you realized you had won, because you felt Olwyn might lean across the table and smack you, though she never did. She was a bit wild in her playing. She'd risk a lot. She scared me to death when she was raging—she had a terrible temper and was incredibly sarcastic—but



she was also very fascinating. She had lived in Paris, and she had all sorts of exciting anecdotes about her life. To a country mouse like me, she was very interesting. Now Olwyn talks about me as if I were stupid and disgusting. She once told somebody that I was a pig living in mud. She and Ted and Carol don't speak to me anymore. I went to hear a talk Anne Stevenson gave at Exeter last year, and there was Carol, sitting at the back. She is very dark and very beautiful. She used to be rather a timid girl—she was a nurse, and she was twenty-two when they married—but she's grown very proud and very handsome. I went up to her and said hello, and she said, 'I cannot speak to you.' It was ridiculous. It's not that I'm trying to push myself forward or trying to climb to fame on the back of the poor dead girl. I know that's how they see it, but it's not like that. Maybe I'm blind to certain things in myself. Nobody can deny that when someone you knew becomes enormously famous it polishes your ego. You think, This brilliant person actually liked me, so I must be of some use. And people coming to see me, like you—of course it makes me feel something about myself. But the times when I've pushed myself forward"—Elizabeth was speaking here of calls she had made and letters she had written to newspapers—"it's always been in reaction to something outrageous that somebody had done about Sylvia."

On a low table beside her, Elizabeth had a file folder of newspaper clippings, many of which I had already seen. The characters in and chroniclers of the Plath legend collect these thin, unreliable narratives as if they were sacred writings. At no time, perhaps, is the power of the press so evident—and so troubling—as when some part of its steady dripping freezes into the stalactite known as "archival material." Newspaper stories that were originally written to satisfy our daily hunger for idle and impersonal Schadenfreude—to excite and divert and be forgotten the next week—now take their place among serious sources of information and fact, and are treated as if they themselves were not simply raising the question of what happened and who is good and who is bad.

I went into William's office and on his copier made duplicates of the stories that were not in my own archive. Over the afternoon, he had become not exactly re-



"Give me liberty or give me an arts grant."

sentful but a little less friendly; he compressed his lips and looked distracted when I spoke to him. When the visit ended, I called a taxi, and as we waited Elizabeth's bright chatter faltered. She looked tired and was probably in pain. She told me that getting from the sofa to the bathroom was a difficult feat. I felt the sadness and harshness of her life; the house emanated pathos and a certain uncanniness. My glimpse of this woman and her husband, who lived so close to the margin and worked against chemical and biological warfare, told me little more than what I have just written, and left me with a chastening sense of the effrontery of my journalist's account of my visit. What did I know about them? How inadequate and off the mark my account must be! The biographer commits the same offense when he proposes to solve the mystery that is a life with "data" no less meagre (when you consider the monstrous mass that accrues from the moment-by-moment events of a life) and interpretations no less crass (when you consider what a fine-tuned, custom-made instrument human motivation is).

The taxi arrived, and on the drive to my hotel I asked the driver if he knew anything about the problem on the railway line that had caused my three-hour delay. He said he did—a tunnel had been damaged by the snow—and predicted that I would have the same trouble leaving Cornwall the next morning. He asked me where I was going, and when I said Milverton, in Somerset, a hundred

miles away—where I was to have lunch with Clarissa Roche—he named a fee for driving me there. I accepted.

THE next day, a Sunday, the driver arrived at my hotel at ten; a woman and an infant were in the back seat of the taxi. I got into the front seat, and the driver said that the woman and the infant were his wife and son, but didn't introduce me. Throughout the ride, he kept up a stream of chat with me but never addressed a word to his wife. The child gurgled for a while and then went to sleep. At first, I turned to the wife to try to include her in the conversation, but she made it clear that she didn't want to be drawn. I felt I was in the presence of a husband-and-wife relationship so archaic, so out of date, that it was almost like standing in front of some extraordinary old ruin. This was the real thing, this was sexism so pure and uninflected it inspired a kind of awe, almost a sort of respect. I thought of Plath's poem "The Applicant," of 1962:

A living doll, everywhere you look.
It can sew, it can cook,
It can talk, talk, talk.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.
You have a hole, it's a poultice.
You have an eye, it's an image.
My boy, it's your last resort.
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

I asked the driver if he could make a small detour, and he pulled over to the side of the road to study the map I had with me. In the hotel that morning, while

looking at the map, I had noticed that the village of North Tawton was not far off the main highway to Milverton. North Tawton is where Court Green is. The driver said "No problem" (he did not consult his wife), and resumed driving. But there was a problem. The driver missed the turnoff to North Tawton and then spent over an hour—instead of the ten minutes of the direct route—finding his way to the village through the traffic-choked city of Exeter. I was now going to be seriously late for lunch at Clarissa Roche's (I had already defeated the object of taking a taxi instead of risking the train), and I deeply regretted my idea.

As we finally drove through North Tawton—a small, silent, austere old village—and I saw the spire of what must have been the church that abuts Court Green, my regret deepened. I was filled with the enormity of my misguidedness in coming here. What could I have been thinking of? What was I going to do when we reached the house? It was one thing to pay a reverent visit to the house where Plath died; it was another to go snooping around the place where Ted

Hughes lives. But I was committed to my heedless course; I could not tell the driver not to bother, after all his efforts, and when we reached a house that I did and didn't recognize as Court Green from Alvarez's description of it and from photographs in the various biographies, I told him to stop. The photographs were indistinct and had left an impression in my mind of a house with a thatched roof, rather low to the ground, surrounded by tangles of vines and wildflowers and old trees and cobblestones—a place that looked like its name and, as Plath wrote to her mother soon after her arrival, in September, 1961, was "like a person; it responds to the slightest touch and looks wonderful immediately." The house I now reluctantly stepped out of the taxi to stare at was tall, and white with black trim. It looked massive and suburban; it put me in mind of the fake-Tudor houses of the twenties and thirties in places like Riverdale and Scarsdale. At the side of the house was a picket fence that I had never seen in any photograph, and I wondered whether this was the right place after all, and when a child came down the street I asked her, "Is this the house of the

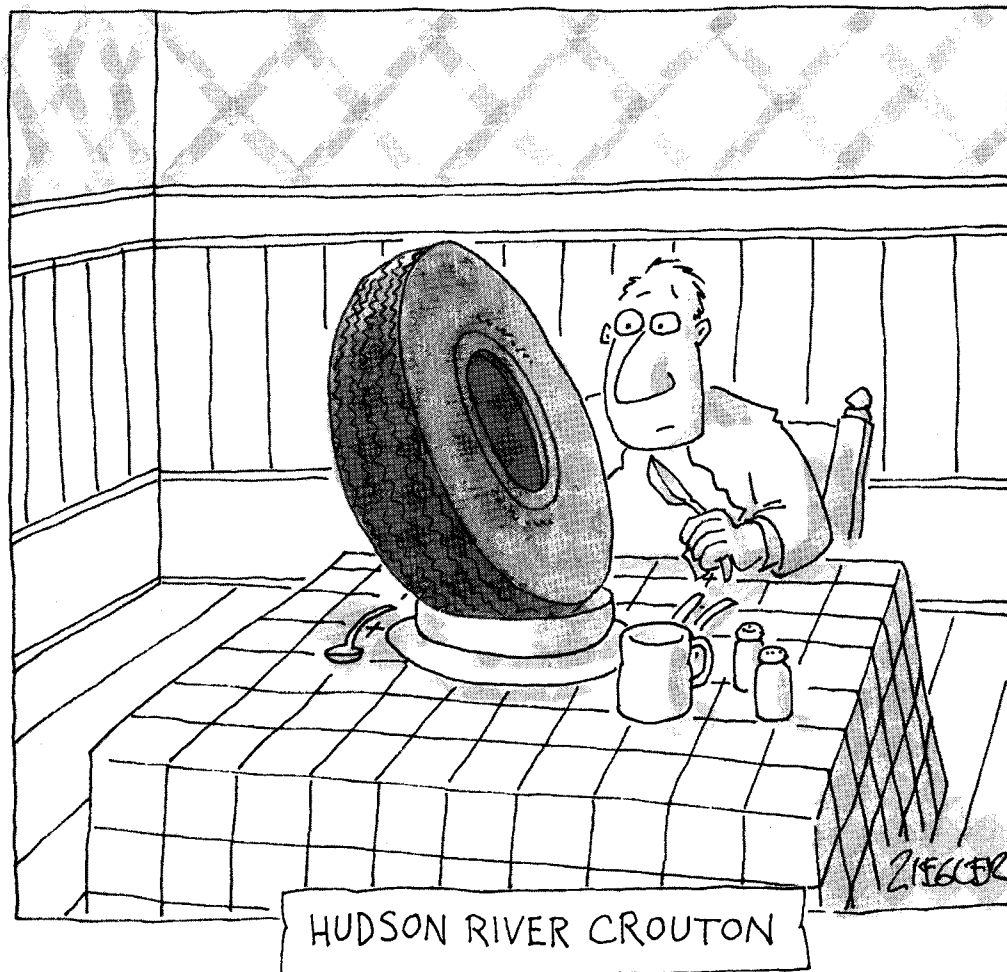
Poet Laureate?" She nodded and hurried on. There was a front lawn, with a few small, bare trees. In the windows, the curtains were drawn, and I was relieved to see none of them twitching. Perhaps the Hugheses were away. Then I saw something that suggested the Hugheses were not away, that my intrusion might not be going unmarked. Hanging from one of the trees on the front lawn was a fully stocked bird feeder, around which English robins and sparrows were swarming. I felt a return of my feeling of tenderness toward Hughes—I felt his reality, his aliveness, his stuckness, and I felt shame at my complicity in the chase that has made his life a torment; I had now joined the pack of his pursuers. But I continued my inspection of the house and the grounds, stubbornly looking for some mental trophy to bear away, some impression to mark my visit to the place where, in the blue hours before dawn, the soon-to-be-dead girl had claimed her immortality. In the 1962 poem "Letter in November" (which Alvarez had told me he believed was written for him) Plath writes of walking around Court Green "stupidly happy, / My wellingtons / Squelching and squelching through the beautiful red." She says, almost gloating:

This is my property.
Two times a day
I pace it, sniffing
The barbarous holly with its
viridian
Scallops, pure iron.

This is my property. It is Hughes's bitter fate to be perpetually struggling with Plath over the ownership of his life, trying to wrest it back from her. In "Daddy" Plath writes of her dead father as a vampire whom she has finally been able to rekill:

Daddy, you can lie back now.
There's a stake in your fat black
heart
And the villagers never liked
you.
They are dancing and stamping
on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm
through.

Hughes has never been able to drive the stake through Plath's heart and free himself from her hold. (Who are the biographers, journalists, critics, curiosity-seekers, and libbers swarming



HUDSON RIVER CROUTON

around Hughes but stand-ins for the Undead woman herself?) He has never found the right maneuver, made the right move that would result in the "death" he seeks. "I have never attempted to give my account of Sylvia," he wrote to Anne Stevenson in November, 1989, replying to a letter in which she reproached him for publicly dissociating himself from her biography, "because I saw quite clearly from the first day that I am the only person in this business who cannot be believed by all who need to find me guilty." He continued:

I know too that the alternative—remaining silent—makes me a projection post for every worst suspicion. That my silence seems to confirm every accusation and fantasy. I preferred it, on the whole, to allowing myself to be dragged out into the bull-ring and teased and pricked and goaded into vomiting up every detail of my life with Sylvia for the higher entertainment of the hundred thousand Eng Lit Profs and graduates who—as you know—feel very little in this case beyond curiosity of quite a low order, the ordinary village kind, popular bloodsport kind, no matter how they robe their attentions in Lit Crit Theology and ethical sanctity. If they do feel anything more vigorous, it is generally something even lower: status anxiety, their professional angst on the promotion scramble.

With rising bitterness and contempt, he went on:

Often enough, all they feel is the opportunity to make a penny. Even yourself, Anne, you remember as I do that it wasn't any great love of Sylvia's poetry, or passion to set her story right, that brought you to this book. When you told me that you could really do with that advance promised by Penguin, my only reaction was: If someone's going to do the book (since it came up in a series), why shouldn't the cash go to Anne? But isn't it usually like that? If a struggling young lecturer wants to place an article prestigiously, will he send in something about Thomas Wyatt or about SP? I expect you know that Paul Alexander (with little more to his name than the introduction to that book of essays) walked into—which publisher I forget—... and walked out with 150,000 dollars. Or have I got the sum wrong. Butscher wrote his biography [so] the publisher would take a book of his poems. . . . Maybe this is a vile angle to view this business from, but what else can I see when I'm howled at to revere it above my own life and to feed it, in fact, chunks of my own life, or at least not try to snatch any of my life out of its mouth?

I've accepted all that long ago but, Anne, please don't expect me to accept it gladly. Or to make no effort, now and again, to surround the children and my wife and myself with a wall of astral fire. If old friends of mine want to defend me (if that's their motive) I don't feel I have to agree with all that they say, nor out of dumb loyalty to them do I have to let the public enter another charge

LETTER IN NOVEMBER

Love, the world
Suddenly turns, turns color. The streetlight
Splits through the rat's-tail
Pods of the laburnum at nine in the morning.
It is the Arctic,

This little black
Circle, with its tawn silk grasses—babies' hair.
There is a green in the air,
Soft, delectable.
It cushions me lovingly.

I am flushed and warm.
I think I may be enormous,
I am so stupidly happy,
My wellingtons
Squelching and squelching through the beautiful red.

This is my property.
Two times a day
I pace it, sniffing
The barbarous holly with its viridian
Scallops, pure iron,

And the wall of old corpses.
I love them.
I love them like history.
The apples are golden,
Imagine it—

My seventy trees
Holding their gold-ruddy balls
In a thick gray death-soup,
Their million
Gold leaves metal and breathless.

O love, O celibate.
Nobody but me
Walks the waist-high wet.
The irreplaceable
Golds bleed and deepen, the mouths of Thermopylae.

—SYLVIA PLATH
(November 11, 1962)

against me—that I run around asking other people to give the low-down on Sylvia because it would look bad if I did it. . . . My simple wish [is] to recapture for myself, if I can, the privacy of my own feelings and conclusions about Sylvia, and to remove them from contamination by anybody else's. . . .

You must not feel too surprised at the way I do it. I wish I could think of a more effective way. But the moment you agreed to work with Olwyn you put me in this quandary of finding a way, any way, of dealing with this bizarre new twist in the situation. You made it inescapable for me.

Hughes's letter, like his second intro-

duction to the "The Journals," works its way toward a stunning culmination:

In all this, Anne, I am very aware that it is not likely that I shall be ever doing the right thing, or even the sensible thing, and at the very best I have ended up serving two masters. I encouraged you to let everybody tell their tale. But at the same time I know what that means to us on the inside, and start looking for defences. And your working with Olwyn simply made the dilemma infinitely more ticklish.

Just one instance will show you how far from my world your book is. I regret not deleting one phrase in particular. When Sylvia's destruction of my papers etc. has

been described, it is said "this could never be forgotten or forgiven," or words to that effect. I remember that conclusion was first drawn by Dido, but it seems to have been understood by you and Olwyn as if it were self-evidently true. I don't think I altered it in Dido's text—I was so exercised trying to persuade her to understand Sylvia altogether differently.

The truth is that I didn't hold that action against [Sylvia]—then or at any other time. I was rather shattered by it, and saw it was a

crazy thing for her to have done. But perhaps I have something missing. She never did anything that I held against her. The only thing that I found hard to understand was her sudden discovery of our bad moments ("Event," "Rabbit Catcher") as subjects for poems. But to say I could not forgive her for ripping up those bits of paper is to misunderstand utterly the stuff of my relationship to her. It is factually untrue, in other words. So in future, in any new edition or translation, I

would like to have that phrase cut out. Let the episode speak for itself.

All those fierce reactions against her—which she provoked so fiercely—from people who thought, perhaps, sometimes, that they were defending me—were from my point of view simply disasters from which I had to protect her. It was like trying to protect a fox from my own hounds while the fox bit me. With a real fox in that situation, you would never have any doubt why it was biting you.

THE SILENT WOMAN—III

The testimony of witnesses is the Achilles' heel of biography. The people who have come forward with their recollections of Plath in the tumultuous last months of her life have revealed much about themselves—but only deepened our sense of the mystery of her death.

I GOT back in the taxi, where the man and woman and child were sitting in silence. "No one home?" the driver asked. I began to explain that I had come only to see the house and thought better of it. We drove on, and the anxiety that had been just under the surface throughout this trip to England now emerged and fastened itself to the fact of being late to lunch at Clarissa's. But when I arrived Clarissa, like a nurse applying balm to a wound, welcomed me cheerfully and waved away any question of being discommoded by my lateness. She is an American who has lived in England for over thirty years and has four grown children. Until a decade ago, she was the wife of the poet Paul Roche (he moved to Majorca after their divorce), who in his youth had been the lover of the painter Duncan Grant and had then become the Watts-Duntonish friend to whom Grant left half his paintings and drawings when he died, in 1978. The rare aesthetic experience I had expected Court Green to give me was now given me by Clarissa's house. Frances Spalding, in her 1983 biography of Vanessa Bell, renders a portrait of Charleston, the house in Sussex where Vanessa lived, ostensibly with her husband, Clive Bell, but actually with Grant, with whom she was hopelessly in love, and by whom she had a daughter, Angelica. In order to keep Grant near her—and as a kind of monument to the fruitful union of the discipline of art with the chaos of unconventional domestic arrangements—she also entertained his boyfriends, one of whom, David Garnett, married Angelica when

she was twenty-three. I now felt as if I had stepped into another Charleston, a place of ravishing and interesting beauty, utterly unconnected to the "English style" of decorating magazines, a product of high, willful taste derived in turn from an ingrained love of looking at the world's surfaces. Angelica Garnett, in "Deceived with Kindness," a memoir of her childhood and youth at Charleston, gives an unhappy child's twist to the story of Bloomsbury but corroborates the portrait of Charleston:

Though we were unbrushed, unwashed and ragged, our carpets and curtains faded and our furniture stained and groggy, appearances of a purely aesthetic kind were considered of supreme importance. Hours were spent hanging an old picture in a new place, or in choosing a new colour for the walls.

Clarissa's house was full of Grant's paintings and drawings, which had been hung with evident care and premeditation. In the hall, there was a singular sight: a Grant painting of two children on a sofa and, below it, the actual sofa. And who should happen to be in the house—spending the weekend looking at art and documents for a biography of Grant—but Frances Spalding herself! Clarissa gave me a tour of the main rooms (through French doors I glimpsed a beautiful old-fashioned walled garden), and then Frances emerged from a study: a tall, thin Diana of a young woman with boyishly cropped hair, dressed in slacks and a long striped T-shirt, everything about her orderly and nicely in place. She had a calm, clear, shy manner, and spoke in a low, quiet, murmuring voice—not speaking very much, but al-

ways to effect. As I observed her over the afternoon, she appeared to me the exemplar of the "good" biographer: one who doesn't overstep, who is respectful of the given, who is unintrusive, judicious, who evaluates wisely and evenly—and who doesn't get into the messes that Anne Stevenson and Olwyn Hughes got into. Her appreciative biography of Vanessa Bell won her critical and popular acclaim; it is a long, well-narrated work. It convinces the reader that Vanessa was splendid—a game, kind woman and a gifted artist, who led a rich, beautiful life—and it is poised on the tension between the demented "plot" of Vanessa's life and its serene day-to-day actualities and achievements. Angelica Garnett's memoir, in contrast, like Dido Merwin's memoir of Plath, is full of aggrievement and complaint and one doesn't like her for it—as one ultimately doesn't like *it*. We don't want to be told what vengeful memoirs like Angelica's and Dido's oblige us to consider: that our children and friends do not love us, that we are neurotic, blind, pathetic, that under the eye of God our life will be seen as a mistake, something botched and wasted. The outcry against the Dido Merwin memoir was a cry from the reader's heart about his own posthumous prospects, an expression of his wish to be remembered benevolently and not all that vividly. It was not the truth or falseness of Dido's recollections of Plath's bad behavior that hurt; it was their unseemly specificity. There is evidence in Plath's own writings that she could be extremely disagreeable when things didn't go well. She knew this about herself and could be



Ted Hughes photographed by Bill Brandt in 1978.

quite strict with herself about it, as when she writes in her 1956 Paris journal of "that ridiculous tantrum last winter about our [theatre] seats not being side by side but one in front of the other, which resulted in Sassoon's sweetly humoring me and turning in the tickets," and adds, "Now that I look back, I am appalled at my spoiled, demanding behavior." When she criticizes herself, we applaud her for her honesty, but when Dido Merwin complains about the food Plath plundered from her refrigerator we only blush for Dido's small-mindedness.

Clarissa served us lunch not in the formal dining room, filled with Grants, but in a small dining room, off the kitchen, that had a fireplace, in which, English style, a few flames wanly flickered. Clarissa is a rounded, middle-aged woman with gray-blond hair and an easy, hearty, slightly vague manner. Just as my readings of books about Bloomsbury had prepared me for her house, so my readings of Plath's journals had given me a feeling of having already met Clarissa. She and Paul Roche became acquainted with Plath and Hughes when Plath was teaching at Smith in 1957-58, and Plath frequently wrote about them in her journal, though only some of what she wrote got into the published "Journals." Frances McCullough, in writing of the "nasty bits" she removed from the published text, cites the Roches as two of the friends Plath was nasty about: "Paul and Clarissa Roche, for instance, who take some tartness in this book and yet were very close to Plath right up until the end." Plath's "tartness" in the published "Journals"—her references to Paul's "machinations" and "seed[iness]" and her descriptions of Clarissa "in a sulk of tears . . . like Miss Muffet in a private tantrum"—is but a faint after-taste of the sourness of the full, harshly derisive portrait of the Roches that appears in the unpublished version, particularly of Paul, who had a repellent fascination for her. But the nastiness of the portrayal, unlike the nastiness of Dido and Angelica, has a detached, disinterested, almost clinical quality. She writes with the novelist's cold eye, rather than with the memoirist's still warm dislike. And she writes—as she also writes of Hughes and Richard Sassoon—with the novelist's artful

TULIPS

The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here.
Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in.
I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly
As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands.
I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.
I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses
And my history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons.

They have propped my head between the pillow and the sheet-cuff
Like an eye between two white lids that will not shut.
Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in.
The nurses pass and pass, they are no trouble,
They pass the way gulls pass inland in their white caps,
Doing things with their hands, one just the same as another,
So it is impossible to tell how many there are.

My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water
Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.
They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep.
Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage—
My patent leather overnight case like a black pillbox,
My husband and child smiling out of the family photo;
Their smiles catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks.

I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat
Stubbornly hanging on to my name and address.
They have swabbed me clear of my loving associations.
Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley
I watched my teaset, my bureaus of linen, my books
Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head.
I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
How free it is, you have no idea how free—

economy and redundancy. A suit Roche wears—"a bright absinthe-green suit that made his eyes the clear unearthly and slightly unpleasant acid green of a churned winter ocean full of ice cakes"—is one of her recurrent figures for him (as hugeness is her recurrent figure for Hughes, and sickliness and smallness for Sassoon). "Oh, only left to myself, what a poet I will flay myself into," Plath writes, in a journal entry of May, 1958. The journals keep forcing us to engage with the idea of what a novelist she might have lived herself into. As they record her struggle to produce the inert short stories, they themselves testify to her abilities as a fiction-maker. Hughes's idea that Plath's genius

for "instant confrontation with the most central, unacceptable things" could find proper expression only in verse is belied by the confrontations that appear in the journals.

In 1958, when Plath and Hughes were living in Boston (Plath had decided not to continue teaching at Smith) and trying to support themselves with their writing, she went back into therapy with Ruth Beuscher, the young psychiatrist who had attended her at McLean, where she spent three months after her suicide attempt. The journals show her working at her therapy with characteristic diligence, acquiring painful insights into the central, unacceptable thing—her relationship with her mother—in

The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.
Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe
Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.
Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.
They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me down,
Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their color,
A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.

Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.
The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me
Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins,
And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow
Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,
And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.
The vivid tulips eat my oxygen.

Before they came the air was calm enough,
Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.
Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.
Now the air snags and eddies round them the way a river
Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine.
They concentrate my attention, that was happy
Playing and resting without committing itself.

The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.
The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;
They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,
And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes
Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.
The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,
And comes from a country far away as health.

—SYLVIA PLATH
(March 18, 1961)

the same way she had piled up letters of encouragement from magazines for her precocious writings and A's for her schoolwork. She also "saw" that Ted was a father figure. "I identify him with my father at certain times," she wrote in her journal in December, 1958, "and these times take on great importance: e.g. that one fight at the end of the school year when I found him not there on the special day and with another woman." The "fight," which had taken place seven months earlier, at Smith, is one of the great novelistic set pieces of "The Journals." That it is a set piece—the shaped, premeditated work of a writerly narrator, rather than the innocent blurtings of a diarist—is es-

tablished by the entry's opening line: "May 19, Monday. Only it isn't Monday at all, but now Thursday, the 22nd of May, and I through with my last classes and a hot bath and disabused of many ideals, visions, and faiths." Something has happened to cause Plath to feel disillusioned with Hughes, to believe that he has betrayed her and lied to her, but she doesn't immediately tell us what it is. She speaks, instead, of the novel she will write—"a story, like James's, of the workers and the worked, the exploiters and the exploited, of vanity and cruelty: with a ronde, a circle of lies and abuse in a beautiful world gone bad," and goes on, mysteriously, "The irony I

record here for the novel, but also for the *Ladies' Home Journal*." Then she writes:

I am no Maggie Verver, I feel the vulgar heat of my wrong enough to gag, to spit the venom I've swallowed; but I'll take my cue from Maggie, bless the girl. How the irony builds up. . . . And all this time it has been going on, on the far edges of my intuition. I confided my faith in Ted, and why is the wife the last to see her husband's ulcer?

What had Ted done? Plath continues to put off the revelation. She writes of attending a public reading of Paul Roche's translation of "Oedipus" the night before, at which Ted had read the part of Creon. Ted had not encouraged her to come, but she had gone anyway, creeping into the hall and taking a seat in the rear, and: "The minute I came in [Ted] knew it, and I knew he knew it, and his voice let the reading down. He was ashamed of something." After the reading, Plath went backstage and found Hughes sitting "with a mean, wrong face over the piano, banging out a strident one-finger tune, hunched, a tune I'd never heard before." Finally, Plath comes to the point. She writes of having arranged to meet Hughes in a campus parking lot, of his not being there, of her going to the library and still not finding him, and then:

As I came striding out of the cold shadow of the library, my bare arms chilled, I had one of those intuitive visions. I knew what I would see, what I would of necessity meet, and I have known for a very long time, although not sure of the place or date of the first confrontation. Ted was coming up the road from Paradise Pond, where girls take their boys to neck on weekends. He was walking with a broad, intense smile, eyes into the uplifted doe-eyes of a strange girl with brownish hair, a large lipstick grin, and bare thick legs in khaki Bermuda shorts. I saw this in several sharp flashes, like blows. I could not tell the color of the girl's eyes, but Ted could, and his smile, though open and engaging as the girl's was, took on an ugliness in context. . . . his smile became too white-hot, became fatuous, admiration-seeking. He was gesturing, just finishing an observation, an explanation. The girl's eyes souped up giddy applause. She saw me coming. Her eye started to guilt and she began to run, literally, without a good-bye, Ted making no effort to introduce her. . . . Jealousy in me turned to disgust. The late comings home, my vision, while brushing my hair, of a black-horned, grinning wolf all came clear, fused, and I gagged at what I saw.

Swept away by her sense of being wronged, Plath sinks deeper and deeper into bitter bathos, writing of "the fake

excuses, vague confusions about name and class. All fake. All false. . . . It is awful to want to go away and to want to go nowhere. I made the most amusing, ironic and fatal step in trusting Ted was unlike other vain and obfuscating and self-indulgent men. I have served a purpose, spent money, Mother's money which hurts most, to buy him clothes, to buy him a half year, eight months of writing."

Which hurts most. To know what was passing through Plath's mind when she wrote this would be to understand much about her relationship with her mother. But we don't know; we can only speculate. Similarly, we don't know what to make of Plath's suspicions about Hughes. Had he actually been unfaithful to her or was she accusing him unjustly? Had she picked up something real in the encounter near the library, or was she only imagining it? In "Bitter Fame" Anne Stevenson opts for the latter interpretation. She writes:

Remarkable about this entire entry is the lightning quickness with which Sylvia made her deductions. One day Ted was her god-like father risen to be her mate; the next, he was a scurrilous adulterer hiding behind a façade of fake excuses, vague confessions, and lies. Ted was a handsome man, and no doubt girls made passes at him. Sylvia's overreaction to seeing him once talking to a student was fueled, no doubt, chiefly by her exhaustion, but it blazed up, as always, in the theatre of her terror, her paranoia, and her ever-ignitable imagination. The girl was in fact one of Hughes's students from the University of Massachusetts who just happened to be crossing the Smith campus as he went to meet Sylvia; he had caught up with the girl only minutes before Sylvia saw them.

The alert reader will be struck by and want to challenge Stevenson's terms "overreaction" and "in fact." The source of her information about the girl from the University of Massachusetts must have been Hughes (it can't have been Plath), and is his account trustworthy? The questions raised by the passage only underscore the epistemological insecurity by which the reader of biography and autobiography (and history and journalism) is always and everywhere dogged. In a work of nonfiction we almost never know the truth of what happened. The ideal of unmediated reporting is regularly achieved only in fiction, where the writer faithfully reports on what is going on in his imagination. When James reports in "The Golden Bowl" that the Prince and Charlotte are

sleeping together, we have no reason to doubt him or to wonder whether Maggie is "overreacting" to what she sees. James's is a true report. The facts of imaginative literature are as hard as the stone that Dr. Johnson kicked. We must always take the novelist's and the playwright's and the poet's word, just as we are almost always free to doubt the biographer's or the autobiographer's or the historian's or the journalist's. In imaginative literature we are constrained from considering alternative scenarios—there are none. This is the way it is. Only in nonfiction does the question of what happened and how people thought and felt remain open.

The journal entry of May 19, 1958 (and the following one, of June 11th, in which Plath describes the violent aftermath of her un-Maggie-Ververesque confrontation of Hughes with her suspicions), once again raises an old question: Why has Hughes chosen to feed the public imagination so many tasty scraps of his life with Plath? His sanctioning of the entries of May 19th and June 11th (in the latter, Plath writes "I had a sprained thumb, Ted bloody claw marks for a week" and "I got hit and saw stars—for the first time—blinding red and white stars exploding in the black void of snarls and bitings") would seem to contradict all his anguished protests against the violation of his privacy. Why, if he is so keen to own the facts of his life, has he distributed them so freely to the reading public?

A possible explanation is so obvious that one is tempted to dismiss it out of hand: he did it because he is Plath's greatest critic, elucidator, and (you could almost say) impresario. Hughes has lived so long in the public imagination as Plath's enemy and censor that his actual role since her death has gone largely unnoticed (sometimes, it would seem, even by himself). But the more one examines Hughes's activities as Plath's literary executor, the more one is obliged to consider the possibility that he has been actuated as much by literary motives as by personal ones—that he probably felt some ineluctable *literary* necessity for needlessly exposing himself to public scrutiny. When the first part of Alvarez's memoir was published in the *Observer*, Hughes protested to Alvarez, "What makes it so much worse is that it was so totally unnecessary. And that it was

written by you—the very person most likely to know that there are quite a few things more important than literature—more important even than great poetry, let alone memoirs." But this was only one part of Hughes speaking—the self that destroyed Plath's last journal and is represented in the second foreword to "The Journals" as "her husband." Another self—the self that has presided over Plath's posthumous reputation and is her fellow literary artist—knows no such thing. To this self, nothing is more important than literature, and no sacrifice in its service is too great. Hughes's plight as a man trying to serve two masters and knowing that it isn't ever going to come out right is, of course, the plight of every artist. His effort to disentangle his life from the Plath legend while tending its flame is a kind of grotesque allegory of the effort of every artist to salvage a piece of normal life for himself from the disaster of his calling. Although we know little about Hughes's own struggles with writing (in "The Journals" Plath occasionally mentions that he is depressed), we may imagine that if he had never met Plath he would still be living the crazy, beset life of the creator rather than the peaceful, sane life of the average newspaper reader.

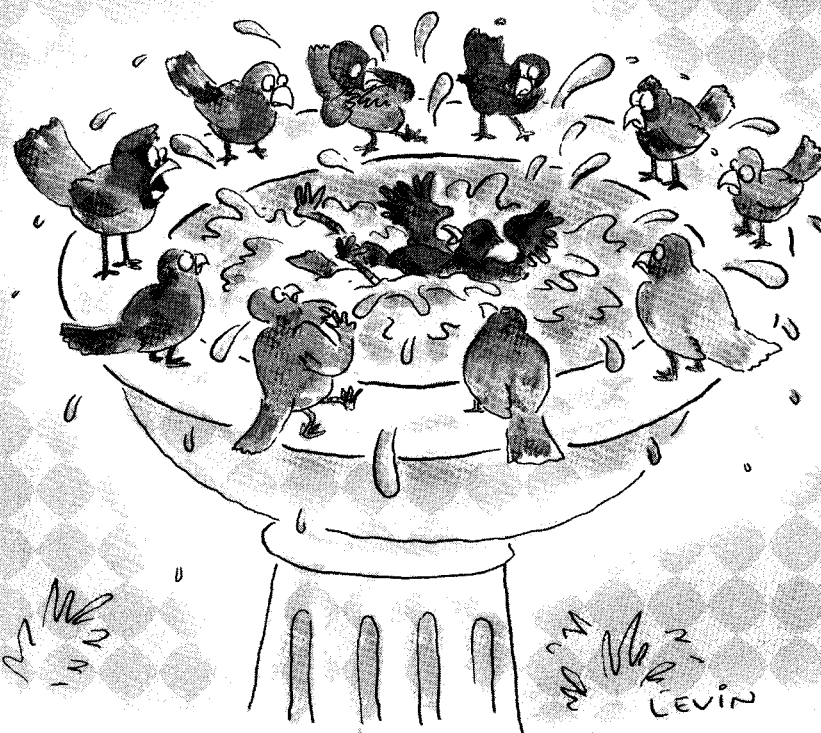
As I now reread the journal entries of May 19th and June 11th, it seems clearer than ever why Hughes could not bring himself to remove them from the published text. They are too interesting, and the latter entry culminates in a scene that someone as fascinated by myth as Hughes is could not help wanting to publish. The scene takes place at twilight in a public park near the apartment where Hughes and Plath live and have gone to walk at the end of a wet, misty day. As they leave the house, Plath slips a pair of silver-plated scissors into her raincoat pocket. It is her habit to cut a rose or two and take it or them back to the apartment; she now seeks a yellow bud to replace a dark-red rose that has come into full bloom in the living room. In the rose garden, while Plath is cutting a pink bud (the yellow roses are all "blowzy, blasted"), three "hulking" girls emerge from a rhododendron grove. "I'll bet they're wanting to steal some flowers," Ted said. He and Plath "stared them down," and the girls retreat; but then, walking on, Hughes and Plath are shocked and angered to come upon two

huge bunches of rhododendron boughs that the girls have hidden behind some bushes, wrapped in newspaper. Presently (the exits and entrances are like those of a ballet), the girls reappear:

We heard muffled laughter and the cracking of branches broken carelessly. We came slowly with evil eyes. I felt bloodlust—sassy girls, three of them—“Oh, here’s a big one,” a girl ostentatiously said. “Why are you picking them?” Ted asked. “For a dance. We need them for a dance.” They half-thought we would approve. “Don’t you think you’d better stop?” Ted asked. “This is a public park.” Then the little one got brassy and fairly sneered, “This isn’t your park.” “Nor yours,” I retorted, wanting strangely to claw off her raincoat, smack her face, read the emblem of her school on her jersey and send her to jail. “You might as well pull the bush by its root.” She glared at me, and I gave her a mad wild still stony glare that snuffed hers out.

It isn’t lost on Plath that she is the pot calling the kettle black. “I wondered at my split morality,” she writes. “Here I had an orange and a pink rosebud in my pocket and a full red rose squandering its savors at home, and I felt like killing a girl stealing armfuls of rhododendrons for a dance.” She goes on—as we somehow knew she would—to contrast her modest, seemly theft (“My one rose a week is aesthetic joy for me and Ted, and sorrow or loss for no one”) with the hulking girls’ gross, wanton one (“These girls were ripping up whole bushes”). Working herself up, she writes, “That crudeness and wholesale selfishness disgusted and angered me. I have a violence in me that is hot as death-blood. I can kill myself or—I know it now—even kill another. I could kill a woman, or wound a man. I think I could. I gritted to control my hands, but had a flash of bloody stars in my head as I stared that sassy girl down, and a blood-longing to [rush] at her and tear her to bloody beating bits.”

Sometime later, Plath wrote a poem about the incident, called “Fable of the Rhododendron Stealers,” which she didn’t consider good enough to put into



“Ex-cuse me! We’re trying to hold a meeting here.”

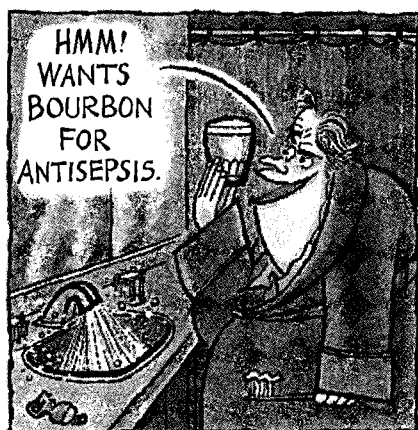
“The Colossus.” (She called her successful poems “book poems.”) It is a pallid, stiff version of the journal entry, ending with the prim question of “Whether nicety stood confounded by love, / Or petty thievery by large.” It is another poem, “In Plaster,” written in March, 1961, that registers Plath’s understanding of what was at stake for her in the confrontation. She was, of course, encountering the “not-nice” part of herself, the “true self” of “Ariel,” the self that was not afraid to rip up whole bushes, because this is what it is the business of the artist to do. Art is theft, art is armed robbery, art is not pleasing your mother. In “In Plaster” Plath uses the image of a body in a plaster cast (in his notes to Plath’s “Collected Poems” Hughes says that she wrote the poem while she was in the hospital for an appendectomy, and a woman in a plaster cast lay in a neighboring bed) to render the opposition between her nice/false self and her not-nice/true self; i.e., “this new absolutely white person” and “the old yellow one” within it. The poem is a monologue by “old yellow.” (I take the term from

George Stade’s very fine essay about the poem, which serves as the introduction to Nancy Hunter Steiner’s memoir “A Closer Look at Ariel.”) The voice is deadpan; it reminds one of Esther Greenwood of “The Bell Jar” (which, as it happens, Plath was working on at the time):

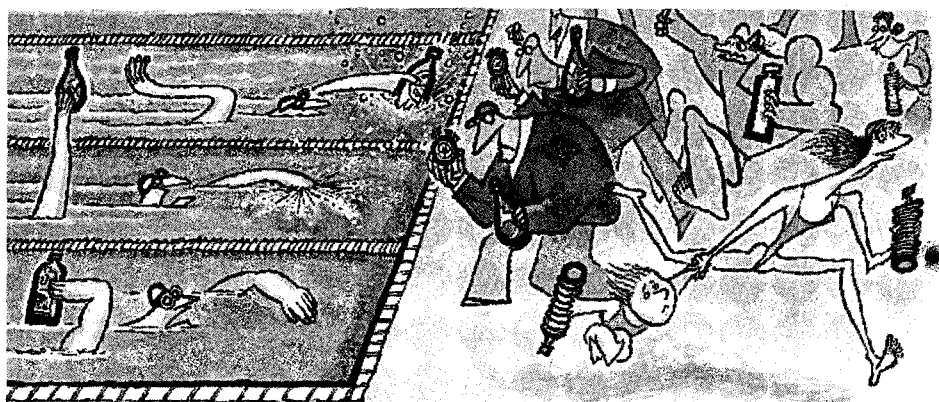
Without me, she wouldn’t exist, so of course she was grateful.
I gave her a soul, I bloomed out of her as a rose
Blooms out of a vase of not very valuable porcelain,
And it was I who attracted everybody’s attention,
Not her whiteness and beauty, as I had at first supposed.
I patronized her a little, and she lapped it up—
You could tell almost at once she had a slave mentality.

The originality of the poem lies in its daring, disorienting reversal of the traditional soul-body opposition, wherein the essential, irreducible soul resides in a gross, irrelevant body. Here the essential part of a person, the precious inner core, is represented by an “ugly and hairy” yellow “half-corpse,” while the outer part,

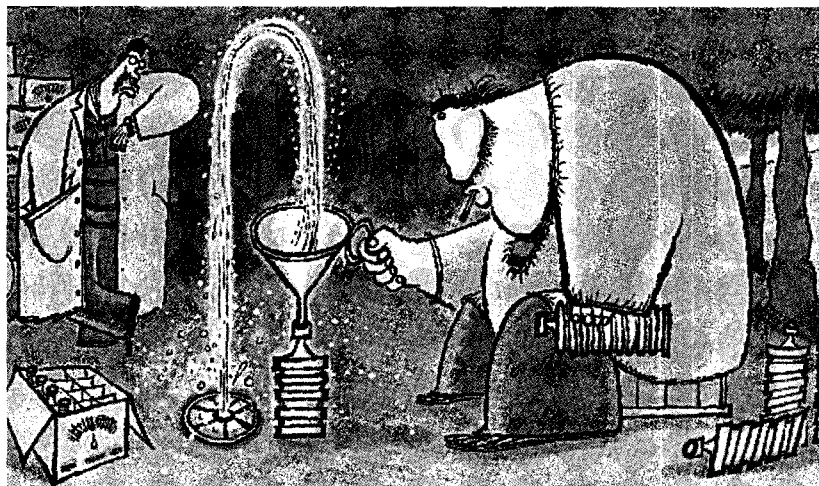
SUMMER IN THE CITY BY ARNOLD ROTH
WATER, WATER! EVERYWHERE!



Mass-produced faucet water has become passé.



Hand-carried natural water (in bottles, naturally) is the current natural rage.



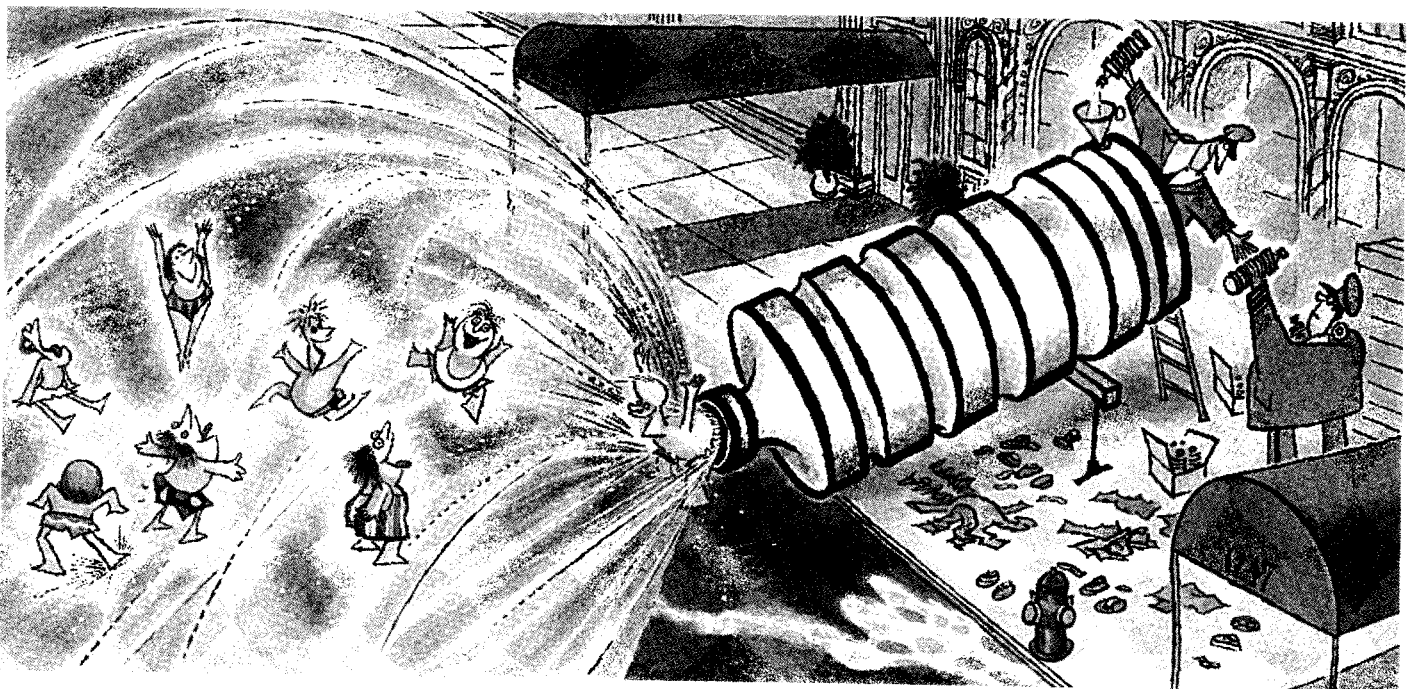
The question: Where do natural waters . . .



. . . come from?



The answer: Different places.



The rich kids' delight.

which doesn't matter ("not very valuable"), is the beautiful, pure, white plaster cast. Old yellow ends her speech thus:

I used to think we might make a go of it together—
After all, it was a kind of marriage, being so close.
Now I see it must be one or the other of us.
She may be a saint, and I may be ugly and hairy,
But she'll soon find out that that doesn't matter a bit.
I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her,
And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me.

The true self is aggressive, rude, dirty, disorderly, sexual; the false self, which mothers and society instruct us to assume, is neat, clean, tidy, polite, content to cut a chaste rosebud with a pair of silver-plated scissors. "One day I shall manage without her." None of us can manage without some of the hard white stuff of social convention around us, the carapace that protects as well as hides our instinctual core. In "The Bell Jar" Plath closely observes the mental disin-

tegration of her autobiographical heroine, Esther Greenwood, noting that she hasn't washed her hair or changed her clothes for three weeks. "The reason I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly," Esther says. "It seemed silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the next. It made me tired just to think of it. I wanted to do everything once and for all and be through with it." Soon after this, Esther tries to kill herself (as Plath tried) by crawling under the breeze-way of her mother's house and swallowing a bottle of sleeping pills. When Alvarez was struck by the smell of Plath's hair on Christmas Eve, 1962, Plath was evidently once again in a condition of wanting to do everything once and for all and be through with it. Opposing the priestess with the long, feral hair was the ultra-clean American girl of Dorothea Krook's description. In "The Journals," Plath's writing is laid out on a kind of grid of "clean" and "dirty" lines of self-representation. On the clean side, she obsessively sets down the baths and

showers she takes, the times she washes her hair, the laundry she does, her housecleanings and tidying; once, she even describes the scrubbing of a pot. On the dirty side, she writes of the clogged pores of her skin, her sinuses full of mucus, her menstrual blood, her throwings up. In an extraordinary passage, written while she was an undergraduate at Smith, Plath presages the precisely observing, perversely transgressing poet of "Ariel" as she celebrates "the illicit sensuous delight I get from picking my nose":

There are so many subtle variations of sensation. A delicate, pointed-nailed fifth finger can catch under dry scabs and flakes of mucus in the nostril and draw them out to be looked at, crumbled between fingers, and flicked to the floor in minute crusts. Or a heavier, determined forefinger can reach up and smear down-and-out the soft, resilient, elastic greenish-yellow smallish blobs of mucus, roll them round and jellylike between thumb and forefinger, and spread them on the under-surface of a desk or chair where they will harden into organic crusts. How many desks and chairs have I thus secretively befouled since childhood? Or sometimes there will be blood mingled with the mucus: in dry brown scabs, or bright sudden wet red on the finger that scraped too rudely the nasal membranes. God, what a sexual satisfaction! It is absorbing to look with new sudden eyes on the old worn habits: to see a sudden luxurious and pestilential "snot-green sea," and shiver with the shock of recognition.

Ted Hughes has let us know (in an essay entitled "Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems") that there is a "twin" to "In Plaster"—a poem written by Plath in the hospital on the same day. This is the great poem "Tulips." As "In Plaster" affirms the life instinct, so "Tulips" is a hymn to the death wish. In the poem, a patient lies in a white hospital room in a state of peaceful inanition. A bunch of red tulips that has been brought to her disturbs the room's atmosphere of deadly whiteness and stillness. "The tulips are too excitable," the patient-narrator says in the opening line of her protest against the invasion by the flowers, which are emblematic of the life and movement she doesn't want.

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up
and be utterly empty.



"What in the world is that?"

How free it is, you have no idea how free—
 The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
 And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
 It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them
 Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.

"The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me," Plath writes as she coolly makes her way toward her distinguished, astonishing final stanza:

The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.
 The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;
 They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,
 And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes
 Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.
 The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,
 And comes from a country far away as health.

AT Clarissa's lunch table, Frances Spalding and I asked Clarissa questions about herself and her acquaintance with Plath and Hughes, but our main attention was elsewhere; it was on the food Clarissa had put on the table, which was to the food one usually eats as her house was to the houses one usually visits. This was seriously wonderful cooking, cooking that warmed, delighted, seduced. Frances and I knew we were not to see its like again for a long time, and we ate with that knowledge well in mind. Before lunch, Clarissa had grumbled that none of the Bloomsbury memoirists had taken notice of her except to mention her cooking; now it was evident why they did.

I asked Clarissa where she came from, and she said Michigan.

Then Frances, in her murmuring voice, asked, "What was your father?"

"What was my father?" Clarissa considered. "My father had an advertising agency—it just sort of happened, because he had to do something. Everything fell apart during the Depression. He was very eccentric." She added vaguely, "He did other things."

"What other things?" Frances murmured.

"He painted. He sculpted. He was a master bridge player. He used to be a good golfer."

Frances got to her point. "Is this,

then, why you accepted Paul's sort of not having a job?"

Clarissa turned to me and explained, "I was saying to Frances that I couldn't think that any family but my own would have accepted a son-in-law who just lay naked in the garden and wrote poetry and lived off the fat of the land. Eventually, after Potie"—Clarissa's second child—"was born, and there were too many people in the house, my mother's sister got Paul a teaching job at Smith." I already had in my mind a picture of the jobless Paul in the garden. Plath had drawn it in her journal of May 13, 1958: "Heard how [Paul] lay naked in the rose garden at Clarissa's mansion in Saginaw, crocheted, while intently observing TV, a light blue wool cape for [a child], with PR embroidered on it in white angora and a bunny tail at the back."

As Clarissa brought to the table a tart she had made herself, I asked her how she had come to write her memoir of Plath in Edward Butscher's anthology of writings about Plath.

She gave a discursive answer, beginning with a displeased account of Butscher's visit to her during the preparation of his biography. In all complicated feuds, there tend to be small pockets of agreement between the antagonists; members of both sides join together in hating certain people, and Edward Butscher is such a person. No one I talked to on either side of the Plath-Hughes feud had a kind word to say about him. "Thank you for your copy of the letter to that rat Butscher," Frances McCullough wrote to Peter Davison in 1976, setting the tone of the discourse about the man. Butscher appeared on the Plath biographical scene in the early seventies, at a time when Lois Ames, an official biographer appointed by the Plath estate, was in the early stages of her research. (Her work was never completed.) Butscher nevertheless embarked on a biography of his own. He later gave a detailed account of how—with no cooperation from any of the central figures, and without benefit of any of the archival material now in the Lilly and Smith Libraries, and before the publication of "Letters Home" and "The Journals"—he amassed the material for his book. "Facts as such are relatively easy to come by in a society

where growing complexity has spawned a growing network of official institutions," he wrote in the introduction to his anthology. "Schools, libraries, newspaper files, governmental agencies, and the like are there for the plundering, as every credit house and FBI investigator well knows, and the laziest of biographers can still construct a reasonable collage from the bits and pieces resurrected from these bureaucratic mausoleums." Butscher was anything but lazy, and his collage of Plath's short life is a dense and detailed one. In fact, it bears a striking resemblance to the collages produced by later biographers, who could consult the published and unpublished letters and journals and, in the case of Anne Stevenson, had the cooperation of the Plath estate. The traces we leave of ourselves are evidently so deep that every investigator will stumble upon them. If the door to one room of secrets is closed, others are open and beckoning.

There is a law of human nature—let us call it the Confidant's Law—that dictates that no secret is ever told to only one person; there is always at least one other person to whom we feel compelled to spill the beans. Thus, Butscher, who did not have access to Plath's letter telling her mother of her quarrel with Olwyn in Yorkshire, was able to get "the grim details" (as he calls them) from another source—Elizabeth Sigmund, to whom Plath had also told the story. But it isn't only our secrets that survive us; evidently, every cup of coffee we ever drank, every hamburger we ever ate, every boy we ever kissed has been inscribed on someone's memory and lies in impatient readiness for the biographer's retrieval. In an almost uncanny way, Butscher's diligent soundings of Plath's teachers, friends, lovers, and colleagues in America and England brought forth a world that paralleled the world reflected in "Letters Home" and "The Journals." The dates, the college weekends, the scenes of necking and petting, and the rows that were recorded by Plath are here recorded from the other side, but in the same intimate detail and with the same authority; the witness, as he blabs to the biographer, is himself like a person writing in his journal or to his mother, without shame, without inhibition, sometimes almost without thought.

If Butscher's book still holds its own



among the five Plath biographies in regard to the scope and depth of its intrusive research, in another respect it has been superseded. The Paul Alexander and Ronald Hayman biographies have introduced a new mean-spiritedness. Butscher's "Method and Madness" is a big brute of a book—shapeless, uneven, filled with maladroitly handled psychoanalytic language and presumptuous speculations about how people thought and felt. When it came out, the Hugheses were appalled by it. ("I found the portraits in the book of my parents, of Ted, of Sylvia herself, of Mrs. Plath and of others virtually unrecognizable," Olwyn wrote in a letter to *The New York Review of Books* protesting a review of the book by Karl Miller as too kind.) But if they could have looked into the future and seen the horrors that awaited them in the Alexander and Hayman books they would have sent Butscher flowers. Both writers have advertised their independence of the Plath estate—neither even requested permission to quote from Plath's writings—and, with their paraphrases and interviews with hostile witnesses, they raised Hughes's punishment by biography to a new level of excruciation. Hayman's "The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath" is as poisonous as Alexander's "Rough Magic," but it is more elliptically and less crudely written. Hayman's contribution to the sport of tearing off Hughes's wings is to publish above- and belowstairs gossip about his relations with Assia Wevill before and after Plath's death. Alexander's book is the prize negative example. Here is his rendering of Plath's famous account of the *St. Botolph's* party:

Eventually, Sylvia dressed in a cute "American" outfit, which she accessorized with silver earrings, a red hairband, and a pair of red shoes. After supper with Nat, she returned to Whitstead, where Hamish picked her up in a cab. At Miller's Bar, a stop they made on their way to the party, Sylvia stood at the counter and quickly downed several whiskeys. Soon the whole world floated around her. . . .

By the time they reached the Women's Union, a foreboding building on campus just off Falcon Yard, Sylvia was very drunk. Still, as they entered the huge second-floor room in which the party was located, she took the scene in. . . .

Guiding her into a side room, Hughes shut the door and poured Sylvia [a] drink. . . . Dreamily, Sylvia looked at his face, noticing his demure lips, his wide forehead, his soulful eyes. Then, as if to acknowledge the palpable sexual charge that had formed between them, Hughes leaned down and kissed Sylvia on the mouth. Pull-

ing away, he tore the red hairband from her head and yanked off her silver earrings. "Ah, I shall keep these," he said.

Sylvia felt pleasantly dazed. As soon as Hughes made a move to kiss her on the neck, Sylvia, ready to show that she could hold her own in such matters, reached up and bit his cheek so hard her teeth broke skin, causing him to flinch. Somehow it did not seem possible to continue, so they stepped apart.

In addition to emptying the incident of all its energy and urgency, Alexander has accessorized Plath's journal entry with details—the "demure lips," the "wide forehead," the "soulful eyes," Plath's "pleasantly dazed" feeling, and Hughes's "flinch"—that appear nowhere in the original. To further illustrate my profound dislike of Alexander's book—whose chief aim seems to be to see how outrageously it can slander Hughes and still somehow stay within the limits of libel law—I offer the following passage:

Only one episode, in Sylvia's account of it, marred the well-ordered, productive rhythm of their days in Benidorm. Years later, she told a close friend that one afternoon while she and Ted sat on a hillside Ted was overtaken by an inexplicable rage. As Sylvia had described it, his face whitened, his body contorted, his gaze intensified. And, according to Sylvia, before she knew it, he was on top of her—not kissing her, as he usually did, but choking her. At first, she said, she fought him. Then, eventually, she merely gave in and allowed his superior strength to dominate her, his fingers to tighten more and more around her neck. Finally, at the moment when she began to lose consciousness—the moment she said she resolved herself to die—Ted released his grip and stopped his assault as abruptly as he had started it. When Sylvia told this story, her marriage to Ted was under enormous stress, and she claimed that this episode had made her question the wisdom of her decision to marry him. Whatever the case, whatever happened on the hillside in Benidorm, Sylvia did nothing.

And who is the "close friend" to whom Plath told the story, and who then told it to Alexander? "The information for this paragraph comes from my interviews with a confidential source," the reference note reads.

Butscher, however, despite all that has come after, retains his special bad reputation in the Plath world. When he published "Method and Madness," he

got into trouble not only with the Hugheses and Mrs. Plath, who resented his intrusiveness into their lives, but with some of the people who gave his intrusiveness its object and opportunity—the people who blabbed to him about Plath and Hughes and Olwyn and Mrs. Plath, and then were appalled to see their words in print. One of these stung witnesses, David Compton, wrote to Butscher:

I am very distressed at the use in your book to which you have put our conversation about Sylvia Plath. . . . Particularly on the subject of Aurelia Plath it seems to me that you have chosen only my most adverse comments—thus falsifying what I seriously believe to be the truth, and most certainly causing unjust and unnecessary hurt. . . . As for my ex-wife's recollections, these—and I positively remember warning you—are likely to be coloured (to say the least) by her vivid sense of the dramatic.

Of course, Butscher was entitled to believe what he wished to believe of what Compton's ex-wife had said, and Compton could, after all, have avoided any risk of causing "unjust and unnecessary hurt" by keeping his "adverse" comments to himself. But Butscher's unpopularity—the special dislike he has drawn to himself in the Plath biographical community—has yet another source. Butscher has figured as a kind of Leonard Bast in the community's imagination—and, I should hasten to add, in his own. When I spoke with him in New York, our conversation was dominated by his class consciousness: he would frequently use the term "lower middle class" about himself and "Wasp" and "upper middle class" about other people. A man in his late forties, with an easy, genial manner, he was at pains to represent himself as plain-speaking and unpretentious. He teaches high school in Flushing, Queens, where he has lived all his life, and has never gained (or, for that matter, seriously sought) admission into any of the higher academic, journalistic, or literary worlds inhabited by most literary biographers. Like the Jew who is fascinated with the question of who else is Jewish, Butscher is obsessed with the question of who else has lower-middle-class or working-class parents or grandparents. In Olwyn Hughes he felt he had found a comfortable fellow-"Jew," with whom he did not have to put on airs. He spoke of her to me with a kind of fond spite: "I enjoyed my encounter with her. After you've spent a great deal of time interviewing Wasps in Massachusetts, you kind of hunger for some



vulgarity. You hunger for this kind of Queens approach to the world of power. So I don't have the usual negative feelings about her. I get a kick out of her."

Clarissa Roche, for her part, did not get a kick out of Butscher during his visit to her house. "It's so unlike me, but I didn't ask him to spend the night," she told Frances and me. "I was perfectly decent to him. But I just didn't take him seriously. I haven't lived in America since 1956, and I know there have been great changes, but I couldn't believe that this man was an academic. Then I got a letter from him saying his tape recorder hadn't been on and would I please write and tell him what I had said. Of course, I didn't. Then, years later, he wrote again. At the time, I was building on to the house and getting all the windows changed, and there was this carpet I had got it into my head to dye dark green—almost black—and I had found out that at Wilton you could get carpets dyed any color you wanted. In his letter Butscher asked me to write a memoir for his anthology, and he offered me exactly the amount of money I needed to get my carpet dyed. So I did it."

Clarissa said she had started a long work about Plath, but "months and months and months go by and I don't do anything at all." In fact, she said, she had gone twice to a hypnotist to try to retrieve further memories of Plath and Hughes, but had failed. Throughout the afternoon, I felt in her the wish to be as hospitable with her memories of Plath and Hughes as she was with her house and food, but as the house and food were nourishing, the memories were exiguous. She was reduced to serving up substantial fragments of stories reflecting her dislike of Hughes. "When Sylvia was teaching at Smith, Ted was sort of indulged," she said. "People didn't dislike him, but he was just sort of nobody."

"He was good-looking, wasn't he?" Frances said.

"I could see that some people might think he was. But I never thought he was."

We left the table and returned to the now almost extinct fire. Clarissa stared into the embers and told a story; it



"We've embarked on a minority-hiring program, and at present we're taking on only people with small, aristocratic feet."

wasn't quite clear whether she had heard it from Elizabeth Sigmund or from Y, a friend of Sigmund's whom Hughes had gone with before his marriage to Carol. "Ted had turned up at Y's house—he had run over this hare—and he went into the kitchen to dress it. He was there a long time, and finally Y opened the door. He had the hare all spread out, and there was this wild, wild demonic look in his eyes. 'Scrying' is a way of telling fortunes by entrails. Y said that when he looked up he was actually"—here Clarissa paused and lowered her voice—"slavering. Now, Y wouldn't make up a story like that."

ON March 18, 1991, a month after my return to New York from England, I wrote a letter to Jacqueline Rose:

DEAR JACQUELINE:

There was a moment during our talk in February that was like one of those moments during an analytic session when the air is suddenly charged with electricity, and what has ignited the spark is some small, casual, unconsidered action by one of the interlocutors. When you produced the passage from Ted Hughes's letter about literary criticism and the living and the dead, and I remarked on the sentence that I had not seen in Olwyn's copy of it, there was (and I

will be interested to know if this description conforms with your experience) an almost palpable thickening of the emotional atmosphere. Your realization that you had unwittingly shown me something you felt you should not have shown me affected us both strongly. As I thought about the moment later in Freudian terms, it seemed to me that issues of secrets and forbidden knowledge, as well as of sibling rivalry (the image of two women fighting over something—over a man?), had been stirred up. In addition, the moment raised for me the question of the place of morality in post-structuralist discourse. You value doubt and accept the anxiety of uncertainty—but you also have very definite notions of what is right and wrong. You immediately felt it wrong to "give" me what Ted Hughes had "given" you. When you asked me not to quote the sentence I should not have seen, you used the word "ethically." Doesn't the very idea of ethics imply a standard, a norm, a canon of acceptable behavior? And isn't there some discontinuity between your position as a post-structuralist literary theorist and your attentiveness to the requirements of living in the world as a morally scrupulous person? Finally (and more directly to the point of our respective Plathian enterprises), doesn't this tiny incident of suppression in a sense reproduce the larger suppressions of the Hugheses? Now that I have seen the sentence, can I "unsee" it?

I never received a reply to this letter—or expected one—since I never sent it. After reading it over, I marked it "Let-

ter not sent" and put it away in a folder.

The genre of the unsent letter might reward study. We have all contributed to it, and the literary archives are full of specimens. In the Plath archive at the Lilly Library, for example, there are several of Aurelia Plath's unsent letters to Hughes—letters in which she permitted herself to say what she finally decided she couldn't permit herself to say. But she carefully preserved the letters, and included them in the material she turned over to the archive. The preservation of the unsent letter is its arresting feature. Neither the writing nor the not sending is remarkable (we often make drafts of letters and discard them), but the gesture of keeping the message we have no intention of sending is. By saving the letter, we are in some sense "sending" it after all. We are not relinquishing our idea or dismissing it as foolish or unworthy (as we do when we tear up a letter); on the contrary, we are giving it an extra vote of confidence. We are, in effect, saying that our idea is too precious to be entrusted to the gaze of the actual addressee, who may not grasp its worth, so we "send" it to his equivalent in fantasy, on whom we can absolutely count for an understanding and appreciative reading. Like Anne Stevenson with Olwyn, I had been tempted by the idea of collaboration with Jacqueline Rose on the rendering of the moment between us over Ted Hughes's letter. But I feared that she would not read the scene as I had read it, that she would tell me that her own experience of the moment had been entirely different and that I had my nerve attributing motives and feelings to her that she did not have. So I tore up the airmail envelope I had addressed to her. But I did not tear up the letter itself, and as I now pluck it from its place of hibernation the thought floats into my mind that some of the early English novels were novels-in-letters.

The moment with Jacqueline Rose that had affected me so strongly and moved me to write my own epistolary fiction took place in the middle of a conversation I had with her at her very handsome flat, in West Hampstead, a few days after my return to London from Devon and Somerset. I was greeted by a small, attractive woman in her early forties, wearing a short and close-fitting skirt and a sweater, whose face was framed by a great deal of artfully unruly blond hair, and whose whole person was

surrounded by a kind of nimbus of self-possession. That she was an adept of a theory of criticism whose highest values are uncertainty, anxiety, and ambiguity was a curious but somehow unameliorating facet of her formidable clarity, confidence, and certainty. During our meeting, her manner was engaging—neither too friendly nor too distant—and on a scale of how people should conduct themselves with journalists I would give her a score of 99. She understood the nature of the transaction—that it was a transaction—and had carefully worked out for herself exactly how much she had to give in order to receive the benefit of the interview. In most interviews, both subject and interviewer give more than is necessary. They are always being seduced and distracted by the encounter's outward resemblance to an ordinary friendly meeting. The meal that is often thrown around it like a cloth, to soften the edges; the habits of chat and banter; the conversational reflexes, whereby questions are obediently answered and silences too quickly filled—all these inexorably pull the interlocutors away from their respective desires and goals. However, Rose never—or almost never—forgot, or let me forget, that we were not two women having a friendly conversation over a cup of tea and a box of biscuits but participants in a special, artificial exercise of subtle influence and counterinfluence, with an implicit antagonistic tendency.

Rose teaches English literature at the University of London, and now, as if addressing a class, she gave a crisp, succinct account of the events that had led her to make public her dealings with the Plath estate. "I took careful legal advice on questions of citations and permissions," she said. "I had followed the business with Linda Wagner-Martin and Anne Stevenson, and I knew this was a potentially difficult area. After I finished a rough draft of my book, in early 1990, I wrote to Olwyn Hughes asking permission for the four poems I quote in full, and Olwyn gave it to me in a very friendly letter." But when Rose, following further legal advice, sent her manuscript to the Hugheses, all smiles ceased. Although Rose is a critic of distinction and originality, in the eyes of the Hugheses she was just another member of the pack of Ted Hughes's tormentors and pursuers, and they

fought the publication of "The Haunting of Sylvia Plath" with their usual clumsy fierceness. First, they attempted to revoke the permissions for the four poems, and then, when that didn't work ("Legally, once you've given permission, then that is a contract, and I had paid," Rose told me), they attempted to persuade Rose to make changes in her text. What stuck in the Hugheses' craw (as Rose had expected it would) was a chapter called "The Archive," which she describes in the book as "a reading—of necessity speculative—of the editing of Plath's work," and which studies the omissions from the letters and journals with a very critical eye. It also takes some savage pokes at "Bitter Fame": Rose characterizes the book as "something of a 'cause célèbre' in the genre of abusive biography," and she joins Alvarez in protesting the book's sternness with Plath and indulgence of Hughes. In accordance with post-structuralist theory, Rose argues for suspension of all certainty about what happened, and thus of judgment and blame. "I'm not *ever* interested in what happened between Plath and Hughes," she told me. "My position is that you're left with a tangle of competing viewpoints, and if you try to make sense of it you'll go wrong one way or another. You have to live with the anxiety that such uncertainty generates. It's not helpful to resolve it too fast." In her book Rose says of "Bitter Fame," "One of the strangest effects of reading this book, especially if you have read the unedited letters and journals, is that it precisely becomes impossible to know whom to believe." (In fact, it is *only* if you have read the letters and journals—or have been in other ways alerted to the controversial character of the Plath-Hughes narrative—that "Bitter Fame" seems strange. The lay reader, who knows only what the biographer tells him, reads it, as he reads every other biography, in a state of bovine equanimity.) Rose continues her argument:

Like the child caught up in a hideous divorce case between its parents, the writing of the life of Sylvia Plath, both by herself and by those who knew her, forces you—and makes it impossible for you—to take sides. Whom to believe, how to know, what is the truth of the case? Behind the self-interest of the protagonists lies a drama about the limits and failure of knowledge and self-knowing. We can settle it, like indeed the proceedings of a divorce case, but only by entering into the false and damag-

THIRTY-THREE YEARS AGO IN THE NEW YORKER

Aug. 20, 1960

Price 25 cents

THE NEW YORKER



ing forms of certainty for which those settlements are so renowned.

What Rose leaves out of account (and what her colleagues in the academy left out of account in their anxious and contorted writings about another hideous divorce case, that of Paul de Man and his wartime journalism) is the psychological impossibility of a writer's not taking sides. "Forces you," yes. But "makes it impossible for you," no. Without some "false and damaging" certainty, no writing on any subject is humanly possible. The writer, like the murderer, needs a motive. Rose's book is fuelled by a bracing hostility toward Ted and Olwyn Hughes. It derives its verve and forward thrust from the cool certainty with which (in the name of "uncertainty" and "anxiety") she presents her case against the Hugheses. In the "Archive" chapter, her accusations against Hughes for his "editing, controlling, and censoring" reach an apogee of harshness. If it had truly been impossible for Rose to take a side, her book would not have been written; it would not have been worth taking the trouble to write. Writing cannot be done in a state of desirelessness. The pose of fair-mindedness, the charade of evenhandedness, the striking of an attitude of detachment can never be more than rhetorical ruses; if they were genuine, if the writer *actually* didn't care one way or the other how things came out, he would not bestir himself to represent them.

Rose is the libber in whom the Hugheses finally met their match, who could not be contemptuously dismissed, who was a serious and worthy opponent. In "The Haunting of Sylvia Plath" she speaks for the dead poet and against Hughes in a way no other writer has done. She objects not only to Hughes's suppressions in the journals and letters but to his presentation of Plath as a high-art poet and of "Ariel" as the tiny nugget of gold extracted from the ore of a painfully misdirected writing life. Rose rejects the distinction between high and low art, good and bad writing, "true" and "false" selves on which the Hughes view is posited. To Rose, the stories written for the "slicks" (as Plath described them to her mother) are no less worthy of examination than the "Ariel" poems. For Rose, there are no "waste products." All Plath's writings are precious to her; all the genres she wrote in, all the voices she

THE RABBIT CATCHER

It was a place of force—
The wind gagging my mouth with my own blown hair,
Tearing off my voice, and the sea
Blinding me with its lights, the lives of the dead
Unreeling in it, spreading like oil.

I tasted the malignity of the gorse,
Its black spikes,
The extreme unction of its yellow candle-flowers.
They had an efficiency, a great beauty,
And were extravagant, like torture.

There was only one place to get to.
Simmering, perfumed,
The paths narrowed into the hollow.
And the snares almost effaced themselves—
Zeros, shutting on nothing,

Set close, like birth pangs.
The absence of shrieks
Made a hole in the hot day, a vacancy.
The glassy light was a clear wall,
The thickets quiet.

I felt a still busyness, an intent.
I felt hands round a tea mug, dull, blunt,
Ringing the white china.
How they awaited him, those little deaths!
They waited like sweethearts. They excited him.

And we, too, had a relationship—
Tight wires between us,
Pegs too deep to uproot, and a mind like a ring
Sliding shut on some quick thing,
The constriction killing me also.

—SYLVIA PLATH
(May 21, 1962)

assumed—and all the voices buzzing around her since her death—are welcomed into Rose's bazaar of post-modernist consciousness.

"The Haunting of Sylvia Plath" is a brilliant achievement. The framework of deconstructive, psychoanalytic, and feminist ideology on which Rose has mounted her polemic against the Hugheses gives the work a high intellectual shimmer. There are close to eight hundred footnotes. One is dazzled, excited, somewhat intimidated. The Hugheses, however, were upset and angered; they could hear only Rose's reproachful aria. They could catch only the

note of hostility that Rose herself was evidently unaware of—that perhaps only they, as the subjects of her criticism, could fully hear. In a letter to Anne Stevenson, Olwyn wrote of what it felt like to be attacked in Rose's book: "I wonder if you have the slightest idea how enormously unpleasant it is to open such a manuscript as Rose's and meet that malevolent surge—from a person one has never heard of before."

As the reader knows, I, too, have taken a side—that of the Hugheses and Anne Stevenson—and I, too, draw on my sympathies and antipathies and experiences to support it. My narrative of

Rose has an edge; my silver-plated scissors are ever at the ready to take snips at her. In another context—if, that is, I had read “The Haunting of Sylvia Plath” as a book on a subject in which I had no investment—I would have felt nothing but admiration for it, since I tend to support the new literary theorists in their debate with the traditionalists. But in the Plath-Hughes debate my sympathies are with the Hugheses, and thus, like a lawyer defending a case he knows to be weak and yet obscurely feels is just, I steel myself against the attractions of the opposition’s most powerful and plausible witness.

In her apartment, having finished her account of the hard time the Hugheses had given her over the “Archive” chapter, Jacqueline Rose poured tea and went on to speak of “another area of trouble with the estate,” which she said she found “at least as interesting.” This area was a chapter of Rose’s book called “No Fantasy Without Protest,” whose centerpiece is a reading of Plath’s poem “The Rabbit Catcher.” Ted Hughes had taken violent exception to this reading and had asked Rose to remove it. Rose had not expected Hughes to be happy with her “Archive” chapter, but she was utterly unprepared for his objections to the “Rabbit Catcher” reading, which said nothing critical of him, and, in fact, took issue with the conventional feminist reading of the poem as a parable of the domination of men over women—the snares the narrator encounters on a walk in the country being seen as the trap that conventional marriage is for women—and as a direct commentary on Plath’s own marriage. Rose offers an alternative reading, which finds in the poem’s arresting, enigmatic imagery a fantasy of androgyny. Although no commentator had ever found this fantasy before—it is doubtful whether Plath herself would have been aware of it—Rose’s reading does not seem very remarkable in today’s climate of acceptance of both enacted and imagined homosexuality; the bisexual component of human sexuality is a commonplace of post-Freudian thought. But for Hughes—perhaps for the whole pre-Freudian English nation—the idea of unstable sexual identity was unacceptable, and Rose’s suggestion that Plath even thought about such things as lesbian sex (never mind doing them) struck Hughes as abhorrent be-

yond imagination. I speak for Hughes so confidently because he made his views public in a letter written in response to a letter by Rose and published in the *TLS* on April 10, 1992. In his letter Hughes movingly, if bafflingly, told of his concern about the injurious effect that Rose’s reading of “The Rabbit Catcher” would have on his children (now in their thirties). “Professor Rose distorts, reinvents etc Sylvia Plath’s ‘sexual identity’ with an abandon I could hardly believe—presenting her in a role that I vividly felt to be humiliating to Sylvia Plath’s children,” he wrote, and he went on:

I tried to jolt Ms Rose into imagining their feelings, seeing her book (as I have seen it) in a friend’s house and assuming instantly that their friend now thinks about their mother the thoughts Professor Rose has taught. . . .

Having thought it through for her in that way, I did not see how Ms Rose could fail to have full and instant knowledge of the peculiar kind of suffering such a moment induces—the little dull blow of something like despair, the helpless rage and shame for their mother, the little poisoning of life, the bitter but quite useless fury against the person who shot this barbed arrow into them just to amuse herself. And the unending accumulation of such moments, since Rose’s book is now in the college libraries for good, her idea percolating into all subsequent books about their mother.

Hughes makes what Rose wrote sound so unspeakable and unprintable that I had better hasten to quote the offensive or inoffensive passage (as the case may be), so that the reader can decide for himself. It concerns the first two stanzas of “The Rabbit Catcher,” which read:

It was a place of force—
The wind gagging my mouth with
my own blown hair,
Tearing off my voice, and the sea
Blinding me with its lights, the lives
of the dead
Unreeling in it, spreading like oil.

I tasted the malignity of the gorse,
Its black spikes,
The extreme unction of its yellow
candle-flowers.
They had an efficiency, a great beauty,
And were extravagant, like torture.

In her “No Fantasy Without Protest” chapter Rose writes of this opening:

For the sexuality that it writes cannot be held to a single place—it spreads, blinds, unreels like the oil in the sea. Most crudely, that wind blowing, that gagging, calls up the image of oral sex and then immediately turns it around, gagging the speaker with her own blown hair, her hair in her mouth,

her tasting the gorse (Whose body—male or female—is this? Who—man or woman—is tasting whom?), even while “black spikes” and “candles” work to hold the more obvious distribution of gender roles in their place. For Freud, such fantasies, such points of uncertainty, are the regular unconscious subtexts—for all of us—of the more straightforward reading, the more obvious narratives of stable sexual identity which we write.

At her tea table, Rose continued her cogent account of her struggle with Ted Hughes over her reading of “The Rabbit Catcher.” She said, “In my communications to Hughes I said—and I say this over and over again in my book—‘Look, I’m in no sense speaking of Plath’s lived sexual identity in the world, about which I know nothing. I’m only discussing fantasy.’ But he says that the distinction is not viable, because the fantasy concerns very intimate aspects of their life. It’s true, it is intimate and it is private. But if you cannot talk about fantasy in a discussion of the literary writings of Sylvia Plath, then you cannot talk about Sylvia Plath. Because that’s what she writes about. About the psyche and about inner images. Wonderful inner images of difficulty and pain—images which implicate us all, I think. I don’t accept the reading that says they demonstrate her pathology. I’m not interested in the question of whether she was pathological or not. I don’t think one knows, and I think you can only make statements like ‘She was pathological’ if you are absolutely sure of your own sanity, which I consider a morally unacceptable position.”

I asked Rose if Ted Hughes had been appreciative of other parts of her book. “No,” she said. She added, allowing a touch of bitterness to get into her voice, “Hughes wrote an article in which he was very critical of Ronald Hayman’s reading of a poem in ‘The Colossus.’ He said that in the classroom this kind of literal interpretation would be a joke. Therefore I thought—as it turned out, foolishly—that there might be some appreciation for my more complex readings of the poems. But I’ve not had one positive statement from Ted Hughes or from Olwyn Hughes.”

I mentioned that I had met Olwyn a few days earlier, and Rose asked, “What did she say to you about my book?” I told her what she already knew—that Olwyn had been displeased—and when Rose pressed for details I cited the pas-

sage in the Hughes letter that Olwyn had handed me in the Indian restaurant.

Rose looked at me with surprise. "The passage about what literary critics do to the living and the dead?" she asked. "Yes."

Rose sat still for a moment, looking thoughtful. Then she abruptly left the room, saying over her shoulder, "I want to see if it's the same passage." She returned with a sheet of paper and handed it to me. I glanced at it and said, "Yes, that's it. It's an interesting perspective, isn't it?"

"Well, it's an argument against the right to do criticism," Rose said. "This line about how critics reinvent the living—'They extend over the living that license to say whatever they please, to ransack their psyches and reinvent them however they please.' It implies two things. First, that I am saying I have *the* truth about the Hugheses' lives—which I never say I do—and, second, that they themselves possess it, and any interpretation beyond theirs is a violation of that singular truth."

"May I look at this again?" I said, reaching for the sheet, the better to follow Rose's discussion.

"Yes, of course. I mean, in the end he

leaves no room for literary criticism. Which may be what Ted Hughes wants to say. Which is a very interesting thing to say. But it also means there's no room for reading, rereading, interpretation, and discussion of meanings in our culture. The implications of this are really quite extraordinary."

"Here's a sentence I hadn't seen. It's striking," I said, looking up from the paper in my hand. "It wasn't in the passage Olwyn showed me: 'Miss Rose thought she was writing a book about a writer dead thirty years and seems to have overlooked, as I say, the plain fact that she has ended up writing a book largely about me.'"

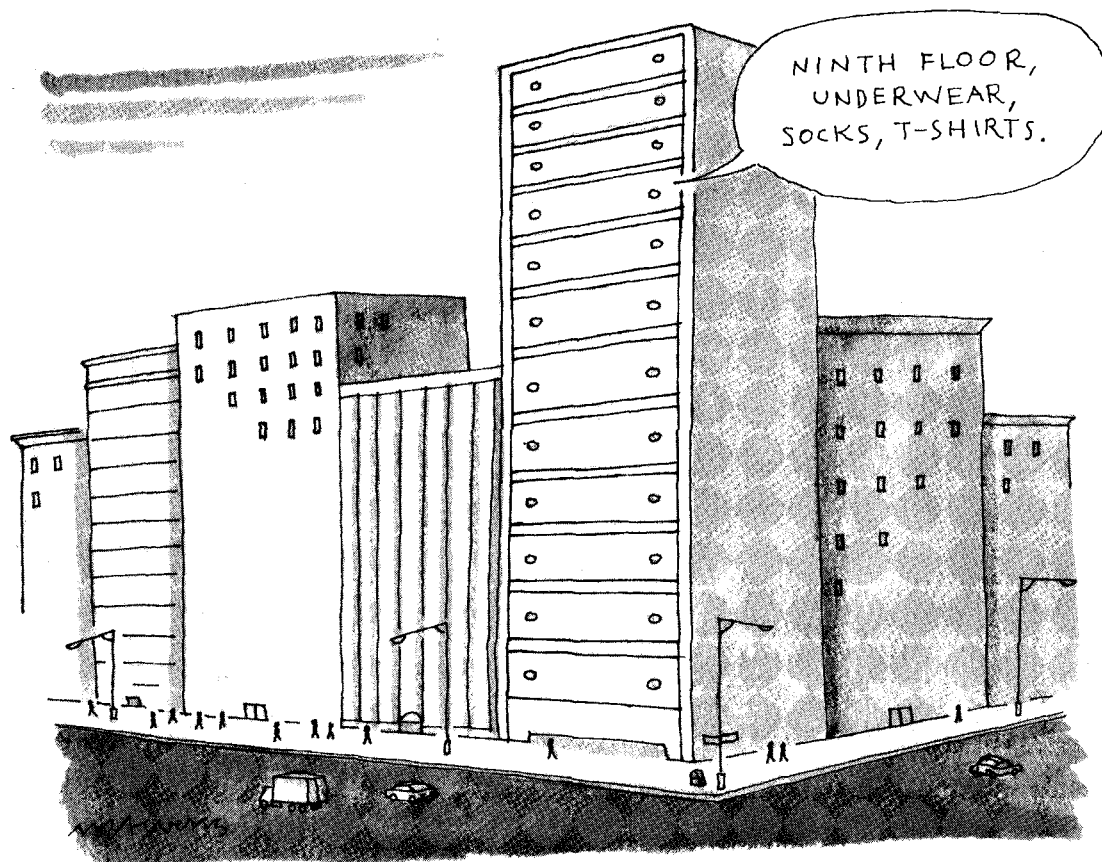
Rose said very quickly, "I don't think you can quote that without asking Ted Hughes. I think that would be a problem legally." (I did ask for and receive permission later.) "And, in fact, I wouldn't have shown you that if I wasn't wanting to check the passage Olwyn quoted to you." In her discomposure, Rose had slipped into a more colloquial syntax: "wasn't wanting to check" was unusual in her impressive, lecturer's speech.

I began to say something further about the significance of the extra sentence—how it affected the meaning of

the rest of the passage—and Rose, again uncharacteristically, interrupted. "Well, I know," she said. "But this is awkward. I don't feel I should give you communications I've received from Ted and Olwyn Hughes. They were directed to me. They were not meant for public circulation. I only showed you this because Olwyn Hughes showed you a passage from a communication to me, right? And it just so happens that you have therefore seen an additional sentence. I think this is an awkward area, ethically. And I would ask you not to quote that sentence." She thought briefly and then added, "Yes, I think I have to say that."

This, then, was the charged "moment" of my unsent letter. I render it with the help of a tape recording, which preserved the words that passed between Rose and me but did not catch any of the language of face and body by which we all speak to one another and sometimes say what we dare not put into words. Deconstructive writers use the word "aporia" to refer to a place in a text of unexpected difficulty or impasse, a passage that does not yield to the reader's usual quick, logical, frontal approaches to understanding. Rose and I had reached an aporia in our encounter—something unexpected and complicated had occurred. I remember feeling that she and I were struggling over something—were having a fight about some central, unacceptable thing—but today, two years later, much of what was going on between us has left no objective trace of itself, and I no longer have the conviction I once had that Jacqueline Rose and I were fighting over Ted Hughes. Like a biographer, I have only the evidence of texts—in this case, the "fictional" text of my unsent letter and the "factual" text of my tape recording—to guide me in my narrative. They are not guides that feel very reliable to me.

IN her memoir of Plath at Cambridge, Jane Baltzell Kopp (the girl



who made fun of Plath's Samsonite luggage) reported an incident that falls rather short of its intended effect. Kopp writes of being astonished by Plath's white fury on discovering that five books she had lent Kopp had been returned to her with Kopp's pencilled marks added to Plath's inked underlinings. Kopp seems oblivious of the offense she committed in writing in a borrowed book; she quotes Plath's "Jane, how *could* you?" as if it were a peculiar reaction. Plath, on the other hand, thought Kopp's act outrageous enough to mention in a letter to her mother and in a subsequent journal entry: "I was furious, feeling my children had been raped, or beaten, by an alien." Biography can be likened to a book that has been scribbled in by an alien. After we die, our story passes into the hands of strangers. The biographer feels himself to be not a borrower but a new owner, who can mark and underline as he pleases. Kopp makes the point that it was Plath's own dark underlinings that "emboldened" her to make her "few pencil marks." (In Plath's version, Kopp wrote "all over" the five books.) Writers on Plath have felt (consciously or unconsciously) something of the same sense of permission, as if they had been given the right to act boldly, even wildly, where ordinarily they would be cautious and tread delicately. In Plath's "cathartic blowup" (as she described it in her journal), she brought Kopp to her knees, shaming her into cleaning up the pencil marks. Hughes's distress over the mess the various new owners have made of the book that he once jointly owned with Plath—but which her death and fame, and his own fame, have ruthlessly taken from him—is understandable, but his efforts to get them to clean up their marks have brought him only grief; he is no longer in possession, he has no say in the matter. His attempt to meddle with Linda Wagner-Martin's biography gave her bland book a status and an interest it would probably not have otherwise had; his attempt to meddle with Jacqueline Rose's study gave this more substantial work a similar *réclame*. As Wagner-Martin had punished and triumphed over Hughes (and Olwyn) with the account in her preface of their hard dealings with her, so Rose, in *her* preface, with the composed air appropriate to

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Two, of course there are two.
It seems perfectly natural now—
The one who never looks up, whose eyes are lidded
And balled, like Blake's,
Who exhibits

The birthmarks that are his trademark—
The scald scar of water,
The nude
Verdigris of the condor.
I am red meat. His beak

Claps sidewise: I am not his yet.
He tells me how badly I photograph.
He tells me how sweet
The babies look in their hospital
Icebox, a simple

Frill at the neck,
Then the flutings of their Ionian
Death-gowns,
Then two little feet.
He does not smile or smoke.

The other does that,
His hair long and plausible.
Bastard
Masturbating a glitter,
He wants to be loved.

I do not stir.
The frost makes a flower,
The dew makes a star,
The dead bell,
The dead bell.

Somebody's done for.

—SYLVIA PLATH
(November 14, 1962)

such occasions, calmly laid out, one by one, the four aces the Hugheses had dealt her:

In correspondence with the Hugheses, this book was called "evil." Its publisher was told it would not appear. At one point an attempt was made to revoke previously granted permissions to quote from Plath's work. I was asked to remove my reading of "The Rabbit Catcher," and when I refused, I was told by Ted Hughes that my analysis would be damaging for Plath's (now adult) children, and that speculation of the kind I was seen as engaging in about Sylvia Plath's sexual identity would in some countries be "grounds for homicide."

Rose's book came out in England in June, 1991, to almost universal acclaim. It received substantial, largely admiring reviews in the *TLS* and the *London Review of Books*, from Joyce Carol Oates and Elaine Showalter, respectively. In the daily English press, it was reviewed together with Ronald Hayman's "The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath," which (happily for Rose) had been published at the same time; the shallowness of Hayman's book provided a foil for Rose's scholarly seriousness, and several reviewers were quick to structure their reviews

VLAD THE IMPALER'S DESCENDANTS



R. CH

around the disparity. The Hugheses' difficulty with this distinction may be imagined. I felt for them, even as I knew the distinction to be just, beyond any argument.

After my return to New York, in February, Olwyn, in correspondence and telephone conversations, continued to voice her vexation over the Rose book. "The book is a determination to show Ted as a monster," she said to me on one occasion. "Rose reads dark Machiavellian thoughts into everything—thoughts that I assure you nobody ever had. There isn't one interesting or intelligent thing in the book. She's a structuralist, she's a feminist, she's a God knows what. Did you actually meet her?"

I said I did.

"What is she like? Does she have four eyes?"

"She's a very attractive woman, very precise and confident."

"Is she English or American?"

"She's English."

There was a long pause; Olwyn had obviously wanted Rose to be American. She resumed: "The way she goes on about Sylvia's sexual life—it's incredible, it's libellous."

"You can't libel the dead," I said.

"But, in a way, that passage libels everybody, doesn't it? It libels Ted, it libels Carol, it libels any woman he ever had anything to do with."

"This is getting very complicated,"

I said.

"It's appalling. It's so intended. It's so nasty. And they talk about *my* wickedness, denying permission to these angels to quote. What can one do? Should one just let them quote and let the myths get wilder and wilder—or should one try to correct them, as I have done?"

Olwyn's attempt to correct Rose—which consisted of sending her a document of twenty single-spaced typewritten pages, entitled "Notes Re J. Rose's Mss—'The Haunting of Sylvia Plath'"—only provided further grist for Rose's deconstructive mill. She coolly added the "Notes" to the hundreds of texts she cites in her footnotes and quotes from in her own text. Rose's method of citation reminds me of those prison scenes in historical movies where aristocrats and beggars, virtuous women and prostitutes, righteous men and thieves have all been thrown into one cell and are being treated by the guard with elaborate democratic sameness. In "The Haunting

of Sylvia Plath," the writings of Freud, James, Ronald Hayman, and a friend of Aurelia Plath's are all accorded the same grave attention; and Olwyn's "Notes" and Ted's letters to Rose are treated simply as interesting late-in-the-day contributions to the book, rather than as angry attacks on it. ("I found their comments helpful, meaningful, and informative, as they repeatedly fed into and contributed to the overall argument of the book," Rose writes.) In August 1991—her fur sleek and a few feathers still around her mouth—Rose wrote me a long letter replying to some questions I had put to her (in a sent letter) after reading the final version of her book:

On the question of why we sent the Hugheses the manuscript. We (i.e., myself and Virago) were legally advised to do so. We knew that publishing on Plath was a difficult process, and both Virago's lawyer and counsel considered that sending the manuscript was in fact the way to secure the book's final publication. We would know the reaction, the likelihood of legal action, and how or whether to respond to the possibility in advance.

I had also asked Rose to explain an odd term, "textual entities," she uses in her introduction. ("In this book, in the analysis of [Plath's] writings, I am never talking of real people, but of textual entities (Y and X), whose more than real reality, I will be arguing, goes beyond them to encircle us all.") She replied that here, again, a legal consideration had guided her. Lawyers had advised her to use the term to make it impossible for Hughes to sue her, she wrote, and she gave an illustration: "Although violence is one of the repeated themes of Plath's writing, I at no point deduce from that writing that any violence necessarily passed between them. To do so would have been legally defamatory, and the book could not have appeared." She added, "More important, however, I have no desire to make such a suggestion, as it seems to me that I have absolutely no way of knowing this, and firmly believe that writing is as much a place to explore what did not happen but is—say—most feared or desired as what did."

Perhaps no greater tribute could have been paid to Rose's position, and to the post-structuralist vision of writing as a kind of dream, which no one (including the dreamer-writer) ever gets to the bottom of, than the tribute Ted Hughes paid in his April 24, 1992, letter to the

TLS, where he wrote of his shock and dismay on learning that Rose had interpreted his remark about homicide as a threat. In her own letter to the *TLS* Rose had indignantly quoted the remark: "I was told . . . that to speculate on a mother's sexual identity would in some countries be 'grounds for homicide.' If this is not illegitimate pressure (it did not—I of course checked with Virago's lawyer—legally constitute a threat), then I would like to know what is." Hughes wrote that his intention had been to arouse her "common (even maternal) sensibility":

I cast about for some historical example, a situation in which what is perceived as a fanciful, verbalized, public injury to a mother's "sexual identity" strikes into her children with a pain that is not only violently real, but is also well recorded, documentary, believed by Professor Rose. I lit on the obvious case, and asked her to imagine how it would be, to interpret some local mother's "sexual identity," publicly (even publishing it to the world), as she had interpreted Sylvia Plath's—in one of those pride and honour societies of the Mediterranean.

I was so strenuously locked into beating at her door, as I have described, simply to wake her up—it never dawned on me that all she could feel was *threatened*. . . .

I was trying, rather desperately and with a sense of futility, to get her to look into her heart, but the only effect I had, as she now tells, was that she consulted her lawyer.

THE game continues. The players come and go, and, as the years pass, the Hugheses seem to grow more accustomed to the unpleasant conditions of the casino. They have got better at their work; they no longer run the place as if it were a candy store. Olwyn has given up the job of literary agent to the Plath estate, though she continues her activities as the fierce and selfless protector of her brother. She writes letters to editors and speaks her mind to journalists, "in her plain Yorkshire way," as one of them put it. When, in reply to charges that the Plath estate was suppressing material, she wrote a letter to the *TLS* saying that she alone, and not she and Hughes, was responsible for "any exertion of 'pressure'" on biographers, readers could almost see her once again interposing her body to shield Hughes from gunfire. In her letters to me, and in telephone conversations, she has alternated between growling about the probability that I have fallen under "the Roche-Sigmund influence" and grudgingly acknowledging the possibility that I will not write the usual "cultist

rubbish." "With these people, you can't appeal to their humanity, because they haven't any," she said during a telephone call. "You can't appeal to their wider understanding, because they haven't any. You can't appeal to their good will, because all their little futures and their little ambitions are invested in their *ill will*—so what can you do with them? One can't go on perpetually bringing up bus tickets to prove that what one said was correct. It's so insulting. It's so stupid. If people wish to believe these silly women and their hysterias, let them. I just can't be bothered anymore." Here and there, in the latter part of our correspondence, she has sounded a softer, more personal note. For example, on December 10, 1991, she wrote:

Sylvia & I: While she was alive I just accepted her. Most of the time it was quite pleasant when she was around. She was very involved with Ted and either busy at her typewriter or in the kitchen but mostly amusing and interesting the rest of the time. . . .

After her death, it became clear that the "Ariel" poems, however wicked, were the work of a major poet. I never doubted that for a second. Then I read the Journals and simply wept for her—that all that agony was beneath that cool, controlled exterior was astonishing. "Letters Home" I found pretty distasteful, but I could understand at least their tone—I found myself writing pretty artificial letters, about the children, to Aurelia, too.

It was always clear [Sylvia] was inclined to be selfish, was inordinately possessive of Ted, and kept one at a distance. But plenty of people have faults of one kind and another. My general feeling was [that] if they were happy together (as most of the time they certainly were) it was put-uppable with.

Clearly with all the mess her various writings and malicious sayings have caused since, I would be a saint if I did not from time to time much dislike that side of her.



But basically I just feel sad for her. . . . I think she was brave, and struggled with a bigger problem than most are handed out.

Passages like this encouraged me to expect that there would be a rapport between us a month later, when we met again. But the meeting—in another restaurant in Camden Town—turned out to be strangely chilly, almost unpleasant. On my return to New York, Olwyn wrote me:

I was depressed by your dogged refusal to realize, seemingly, what I meant by Sylvia's lack of openness, which—for me, at least—resulted in my feeling that I knew her so little. . . . And I would not have thought the concept difficult to grasp. This was hardly a feeling unique to me—many people who knew her better or as well as I did have made similar comments. . . .

Having one's word continually judged and doubted . . . is unpleasant and frustrating.

What had triggered Olwyn's anger was some remarks I made about a man named Ed Cohen, with whom Plath had corresponded when she was in college. At the Lilly Library, I had read Cohen's letters to her—they were wonderful, evocative letters—and I had flown out to Chicago to speak with him. Cohen had written to Plath after reading a short story of hers in *Seventeen*, she had responded, and a (veiled) romance by mail had developed. Then, one day, Cohen suddenly appeared at Smith, and the romance abruptly ended. He was evidently not Plath's type, and she was not nice to him. Presently, the correspondence resumed—Cohen apparently forgave her for her rejection of his actual person and accepted his Cyrano role. In Chicago, in a beautiful, neglected early-twentieth-century stucco house, where he lives and runs a business in used electronic devices, Cohen told me a strange, complicated story about how Plath's letters to him had vanished from a file cabinet. On reading the review of "Bitter Fame" in the *Times Book Review*, Cohen wrote a letter to the editor, published six weeks later, in which he identified himself as "a close friend and frequent correspondent of Sylvia Plath in the early nineteen-fifties," and said, "Sylvia Plath was, from at least late adolescence on, at her very best what the psychiatrists refer to as a borderline personality." During my interview with him, Cohen also characterized her as "manic depressive," "paranoid," and "practically anything else you want to pull out of the hat as far as psychological terms are concerned," adding, "She must have been a very, very

difficult person to live with." Telling Olwyn of my meeting with Cohen, I suggested that his "diagnosis" of Plath was a kind of revenge for her rejection of him, and I mentioned other men she had rejected (Peter Davison is one) who had come forward after her death to pronounce on her personality problems. Olwyn, her radar always searching for crypto-libber views, had taken my defense of Plath against her stung boy-friends as an attack on her own attitude and position. I quickly wrote back a mollifying reply, and our "row" subsided. We have resumed our peaceful, odd, wary correspondence.

A very businesslike, impersonal figure at Faber & Faber, Hughes's publisher, now handles permissions. He writes terse notes to supplicants, telling them that he will forward their requests to Ted and Carol Hughes (one deals with the couple as a unit), and will write again when he hears from them. Sometimes he doesn't hear for a long time. In securing the permissions for this essay, I have collected a dossier of his brief, bloodless communications. (My negotiations with the estate were tense but fairly straightforward. The Hugheses originally wanted the right to read my manuscript in its entirety, as a condition of giving permission to quote from writings under their control. I found this proposal unacceptable. Presently, they changed their position and asked to see only the paragraphs on either side of the quotations. This condition I accepted, and the relevant permissions were granted under it.) I have formed an image of him that resembles one of the pair of men in Plath's poem "Death & Co.":

The one who never looks up, whose
eyes are lidded
And balled, like Blake's,
Who exhibits

The birthmarks that are his trade-
mark—
The scald scar of water,
The nude
Verdigris of the condor.

Alvarez recalls in his memoir that Plath read this poem aloud to him during his visit to her flat on Christmas Eve, and that he "argued inanely" with her about the image of the condor. "I said it was exaggerated, morbid. On the contrary, she replied, that was exactly how a condor's legs looked. She was right, of course. I was only trying, in a

EDGE

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

Them back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

—SYLVIA PLATH
(February 5, 1963)

futile way, to reduce the tension and take her mind momentarily off her private horrors—as though that could be done by argument and literary criticism!" In mid-January, Alvarez reports, Plath wrote him a note proposing a visit to the zoo with the children so she could show him the nude verdigris of the condor. He did not answer.

AT noon on a mild gray day in September of 1991, I got off a train at an ugly modernized station in Bedford, a town an hour out of London, and found that Trevor Thomas, the man meeting my train, wasn't there. Thomas was the third member of the anti-Hughes axis of Elizabeth Sigmund and Clarissa Roche. He was the source of the story about the party with bongo drums in Plath's flat on the night of her funeral (for which the *Independent*

had to apologize, and which he himself had to retract). He was the man who had lived downstairs from Plath on Fitzroy Road and may have been the last person to see her alive; he said that on the eve of her suicide Plath appeared at his door and borrowed stamps from him. In Alvarez's memoir, Thomas is the linchpin of Alvarez's theory that Plath had not meant to die but had intended to rise from her death by gassing as she had risen from her death by sleeping pills. She had, according to Alvarez, counted on "the elderly painter who lived below" (he was fifty-five) to save her. A new au-pair girl was scheduled to arrive at nine, and if all had gone according to plan Thomas would have heard her ringing the doorbell; she would have discovered Plath's still warm body, and "there is little doubt she would have been saved." But Thomas had not heard the ring-

ing—gas had evidently seeped down to his apartment and drugged him—and by the time the girl returned with help, after an interminable wait at a telephone box, it was too late. (In “Bitter Fame,” the idea that Plath would have been saved if the girl—who, further research disclosed, was a nurse for Plath, sent by Plath’s doctor, John Horder—had got into the house at nine is put into doubt. Stevenson writes, “It is Dr. Horder’s opinion that even if she had been rescued while her body was alive, it is likely that her mind would have been destroyed.”)

Thomas himself neither confirmed nor disputed Alvarez’s account; he had moved out of London, and nothing was heard from him, or of him, until 1986, when he resurfaced in the Plath legend. A letter by Elizabeth Sigmund in the *Observer*, protesting a characterization of Plath in its columns, caught his approving eye and prompted him to write to Sigmund through the newspaper. Sigmund then passed the seventy-nine-year-old Thomas on to Roche, who persuaded him to put his memories down on paper. At her urging, he produced a twenty-seven-page typewritten manuscript—in 1989, he had it photocopied and bound in an edition of two hundred copies—chronicling his two-month-long acquaintance with Plath at 23 Fitzroy Road and recounting what he heard and saw in the house in the months following her death. The memoir, called “*Sylvia Plath: Last Encounters*,” is a remarkable document. Like Dido Merwin’s memoir, it renders an immediate and vivid self-portrait, and, like Dido, Thomas remembers Plath unaffectionately. But, unlike Dido, Thomas doesn’t put Plath down in order to elevate Hughes: he speaks badly of him, too. He isn’t really interested in either Plath or Hughes. He makes it clear that he is interested only in his own life. That he knew Plath at all was just another of the pieces of bad luck by which his life has been dogged. “Ever since my wife left me in September 1962 I had been desperate to find somewhere where my sons Giles and Joshua could live with me,” Thomas writes on the opening page of “*Last Encounters*.” One day in late October or early November—it was shortly before Plath wrote her ecstatic letter to Mrs. Plath about finding the maisonette on Fitzroy Road—Thomas

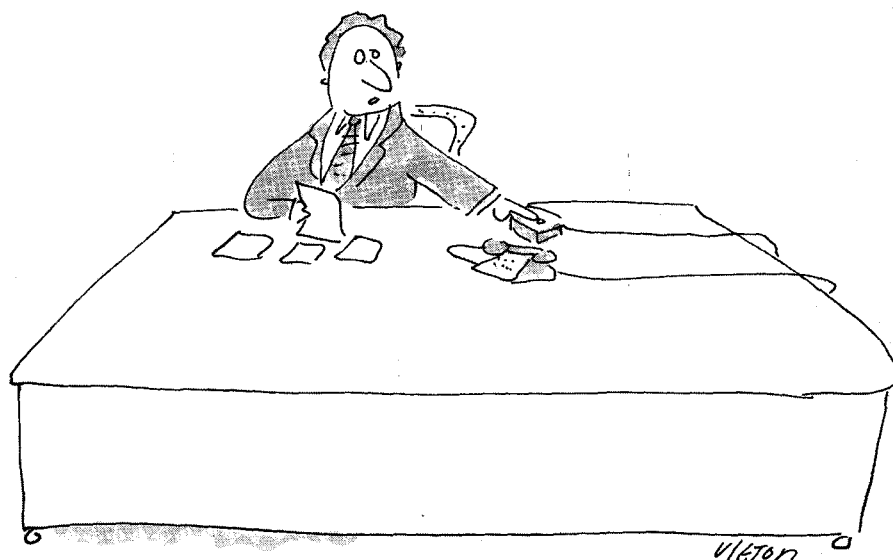
saw the flat, too, and was equally enamored of it. The problem was the high rent: he wasn’t sure he could raise the money needed to pay the required three months’ rent in advance, and he asked the real-estate agent to hold the maisonette over the weekend, which the agent agreed to do. But when Thomas telephoned on Monday, to say he would take it, it was gone. The agent “told me that a young married couple with two small children, a Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, had viewed on Sunday afternoon, and because he felt their need was greater than mine he had let them have the maisonette, and he had reserved the ground-floor flat for me.” Thomas continues:

I was very angry, because the ground-floor flat was too small. Also I felt sure I had been cheated in some way. Although they were now living apart, Ted Hughes was helpful, going along with her to house agents, who would be unlikely to let to a woman living alone with two children. Years afterwards, I learned that Mrs. Hughes had paid a *year’s rent* in advance and signed a five-year lease. No wonder the agents thought their need was greater than mine.

Even though the ground-floor flat didn’t suit him, Thomas took it. “I had to make the best of a poor deal,” he grumbles. “I had my belongings brought out of store and stuffed into the flat. . . . I was having to construct bunk beds for the boys.” The reason for this, on the face of it, mystifying compromise—surely he could have looked elsewhere for a larger flat—was the blue ceramic plaque with Yeats’s name on it. In his youth in Liverpool, Thomas had been

in charge of a production of Yeats’s play “*At the Hawk’s Well*.” He had produced, acted in, and designed the costumes for it. Thomas believes in the occult, and he felt he “had to” live in Yeats’s house on Fitzroy Road. But he felt under no obligation to be helpful, or even particularly civil, to the young woman who moved into the flat upstairs, and in his memoir he relates with a kind of relish his various unhelpfulnesses and incivilities. When Plath, on the day of her arrival, accidentally locked herself and the crying children out of the flat and applied to Thomas for help, “I had to dash her hopes about the keys, as I had only those for my flat. The last thing I wanted was to become involved, so I advised her to phone the police, and I went on my way.” On another occasion, during the big freeze, when there was deep snow and Plath couldn’t start her car, “she wanted me to go out and swing one of those heavy handles you had to insert in the front of the car to get it started. I had to refuse, because if you didn’t have the knack of it you could break a thumb, or even a wrist.” Thomas reports that Plath put her garbage in his trash cans instead of getting trash cans of her own, and blocked the hallway with her baby carriage. “I think it would be correct to say that I did not positively dislike her,” he writes. He adds:

She tended to be a self-centered person, not letting herself become involved with other people’s problems. Never at any time did she wonder about me and my sons and what stress we might be under. Nor did she



“Miss Phillips, send in the Sixth Armored Division.”

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The Bell Jar
(Harper & Row, 1971)

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(Harper & Row, 1981)

*The Colossus and
Other Poems*
(Knopf, 1962)

*Johnny Panic and the Bible
of Dreams: Short Stories, Prose,
and Diary Excerpts*
(Harper & Row, 1980)

The Journals of Sylvia Plath
edited by Frances McCullough;
consulting editor, Ted Hughes
(Dial, 1982)

*Letters Home: Correspondence,
1950-1963*
edited with commentary
by Aurelia Schober Plath
(Harper & Row, 1975)

BY TED HUGHES

*Crow: From the Life and
Songs of the Crow*
(Harper & Row, 1971)

Gaudete
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*The Hawk
in the Rain*
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Lupercal
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Wolfwatching
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Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath
by Anne Stevenson
(Houghton Mifflin, 1989)

*The Death and Life
of Sylvia Plath*
by Ronald Hayman
(Birch Lane Press, 1991)

*Rough Magic: A Biography
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Sylvia Plath: A Biography
by Linda Wagner-Martin
(Simon & Schuster, 1987)

*Sylvia Plath: Method
and Madness*
by Edward Butscher
(Seabury Press, 1976)

OTHER WORKS

*Ariel Ascending: Writings
About Sylvia Plath*
edited by Paul Alexander
(Harper & Row, 1985)

*The Art of Sylvia Plath:
A Symposium*
edited by Charles Newman
(Indiana, 1970)

The Haunting of Sylvia Plath
by Jacqueline Rose
(Harvard, 1992)

*The Savage God:
A Study of Suicide*
by A. Alvarez
(Random House, 1972)

*Sylvia Plath: The Woman
and the Work*
edited by Edward Butscher
(Dodd, Mead, 1977)

manifest any interest in my paintings nor in what I did. The world revolved around her. This self-preoccupation I have observed in other creative people.

Thomas presently gets to his two set pieces, the "last encounters" of his title. In the first, which takes place about 8 P.M. on a Sunday not long before Plath's death, she appears at his door and is so distressed that even he is moved:

She stood there with red, swollen eyes, the tears running down her face, and with voice shaken by sobs she said: "I am going to die . . . and who will take care of my children?" I did not quite know what to do. I reached out and took her arm. "You'd better come in and sit down. I'll get you a drink."

Plath weepily tells Thomas that she has come to the end of her tether. Then her mood changes and she becomes

fiercely angry with an intensity that was quite alarming as she punched clenched fists up and down. "It's that awful woman's fault. She stole him. We were so happy and she stole him away from me. She's an evil woman, a scarlet woman, the Jezebel. They're in Spain spending our money, my money. Oh! How I hate them!" She was in such a tantrum I tried to distract her by telling her that my wife was supposed to be in Spain with the man she'd gone off with; wouldn't it be funny if they were in the same hotel in Barcelona? It didn't work. As on previous occasions, she was wholly and intensely concerned only with her troubles. She had no time for mine.

In the second encounter, at eleven-forty-five on the eve of Plath's death, she again comes to his door, this time to ask for stamps. She says she needs them to post letters to America that night. Thomas gives her the stamps, and she opens a small purse to reimburse him. "I told her not to worry, as I never took money for stamps, whereupon she said, 'Oh! But I must pay you or I won't be right with my conscience before God, will I?' " After reentering his flat, Thomas continues to see light under his front door and returns to find Plath still standing in the hallway with "her head raised with a kind of seraphic expression on her face." Thomas offers to call her doctor—she looks very ill to him—but she says, "No, please don't do that. I'm just having a marvelous dream, a most wonderful vision." She doesn't accept Thomas's offer to come into his flat or his suggestion that she go back upstairs. She continues standing in the hallway, and he finally tells her, "I'd have to go or I wouldn't be able to get up in time." As it proves, he does not get up until five

o'clock the next afternoon. Because of the gas leaking down to his flat, he entirely misses the commotion of the morning: the discovery of the body, the arrival of the police and ambulance, the crying children, the shocked relatives. It is a fine stroke—worthy of a canny novelist—that the egocentric narrator of “Last Encounters” should be spared the role of ordinary appalled onlooker and given his own “death” to undergo. By the time Thomas awakens, feeling strange and his head hurting, the house is quiet, and he simply goes to his job, at the Gordon Fraser Gallery, to (oddly) apologize for not having telephoned. Only on his return—his boss sends him home—does he learn of the suicide from a neighbor.

At the Bedford station, at twenty minutes past the hour, a wan sun appeared in the gray sky. I looked nervously at my watch. Then a tall man of around seventy shambled toward me. “I’m Robbie,” he said, and apologized for his lateness, which, he said, had to do with an unsuccessful attempt to buy a vegetarian pizza. “Trevor is in the car,” he said. “He’s been having a bit of trouble with his leg, so he stayed in the car.” Robbie spoke slowly and calmly and evenly. He had a protuberant belly, weary eyes, and the steady, mildly subduing manner of a nurse or a dog trainer. In the car, Thomas reached out an inattentive hand and immediately began to speak fretfully of the pizza with sausages that he had been obliged to buy because the shop that sold vegetarian pizza was closed on Sunday. The vegetarian pizza had been sought on my behalf, and though I said it didn’t matter in the slightest, Thomas continued to fuss about it. A distinguished-looking man with white hair and a white beard, he was dressed in a kind of jumpsuit made of black-and-white striped seersucker; a bit of turquoise shirt showed at the throat, and a medal hung down his chest. He carried his handsome head proudly, and his rosy lips were set in a pout. His left leg (I thought of Elizabeth Sigmund) was badly swollen.

The car was a secondhand vehicle that Robbie and Thomas had bought the day before and didn’t quite have the hang of yet. At every light, there was a fierce struggle with the gearshift. I asked Thomas a question about his memoir, and he started to answer and then said, “I’m too anxious about the car to talk now.

I’ll talk later.” As we neared a small grocery, Thomas told Robbie to stop; he spoke to him as if Robbie were the chauffeur. Robbie obediently pulled over to the curb. “Get some stuffed olives and Heinz salad cream,” Thomas said. Robbie went into the shop. While he was there, Thomas told me a dream he had had the night before. “I was in a landscape of pink rocks overlooking the sea. A young hippie girl came up to me and asked for money. I said, ‘I’m a Frenchman, and I have to go home.’ She said, ‘I’ll follow you,’ and she kept trying to push me off the pink rocks into the sea below. I kept saying, ‘Don’t do it. I haven’t any money,’ and she kept saying, ‘I don’t care.’”

Robbie came out of the store with a parcel. “Here we are, Trevor,” he said. “Now, she doesn’t have any stuffed olives, but I got the two other kinds. Here’s the change. Is there anything else you’ve thought of?”

Thomas considered and then said, “You could get some prepared French dressing for the avocados.” Robbie stolidly started for the shop again. I felt the shameful, murderous impatience that maundering old people engender in those who still have time to spare. Thomas reconsidered. “Never mind,” he called after Robbie. “I’ll make my own dressing.” Robbie impassively turned back.

When we were on our way again, I said to Thomas, “How do you interpret your dream? Do you think it had something to do with my coming to talk to you today about Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes?”

“No,” Thomas said. “It had to do with my brother going off with someone else, leaving me—”

Robbie cut in blandly, “Before you begin, Trevor, I think you’d better tell Janet what you have to say about the—er—legal side.”

“If you could please be quiet,” Thomas said. “If you talk and tell me what to do, I will make mistakes.”

“All right,” Robbie said.

“If you leave it to my intuition, it will be much smarter of you.”

“All right.”

“It’s my story. I was the one who had to put up with it, and nearly go to Heaven on it.”

I already knew something about “the legal side.” After bringing the *Independent* before the Press Council over the bongo-drum story, Hughes had a court order issued against Thomas to insure

that the libel be permanently put to rest. The libel derived from the closing pages of “Last Encounters,” covering the period after Plath’s death, when relatives, friends of Plath and Hughes, and successive nannies appeared at 23 Fitzroy Road, and Thomas, from his ground-floor post, darkly observed their comings and goings. Like his early meetings with Plath, his meetings with her survivors were brief and fragmentary; in his account of them, petty aggrievement and voyeurism again struggle for ascendancy over the writer’s feelings. Thomas reports several meetings between him and Hughes and Assia Wevill. He writes appreciatively of Wevill (she was “very helpful in getting an interview for Giles with the J. Walter Thompson organization, for which she worked”) but presents Hughes as a haughty, menacing figure who was consistently unpleasant to him: “I knew from my first view of him he was someone I’d want to keep at a very safe distance.” Later, Thomas reports, when he mistakenly thought that a burglar had broken into the Plath flat, and called the police, who roused Hughes from his sleep, the irritated Hughes “shouted down the stairs for my benefit: ‘It’s only that silly old fool downstairs.’” In Hughes’s letter to Andrew Motion about Wagner-Martin’s biography—the letter in which he wrote of the “mental breakdown, neurotic collapse, domestic catastrophe” that “saved us from several travesties of this kind being completed”—he went on to make a large, blunt point:

The main problem with S.P.’s biographers is that they fail, at the outset, when they embark on the book they hope will sell a lot of copies, to realize that the most interesting and dramatic part of S.P.’s life is only 1/2 S.P.—the other 1/2 is *me*. They can caricature and remake S.P. in the image of their foolish fantasies, and get away with it—and assume, in their brainless way, that it’s perfectly O.K. to give me the same treatment. Apparently forgetting that I’m still here, to check, and that I’ve no intention of feeding myself to their digestions and submitting myself to their reconstitution, if I can help it.

In the case of Thomas’s memoir, Hughes had to leave Plath to Thomas’s mercies, but he brought a lawsuit against Thomas and forced him to withdraw and apologize for—I quote from a legal document of 1990—the “suggestion that on the very evening of Sylvia Plath’s funeral Mr. Hughes had attended a high-spirited and boisterous party, with bongo drums, which was organized and held in the flat where Sylvia Plath

had earlier that week committed suicide, the stated purpose of the party being to 'cheer up' Mr. Hughes." This document, which was read in open court, also contained Thomas's acknowledgment that the suggestion was false, that "Mr. Hughes was not present at any such party as was referred to in the Memoir, and indeed he [Thomas] now accepts that he was mistaken as to whether such a party took place on the night in question."

As I started to question Thomas about his legal encounter with Hughes, we arrived at our destination: a small house on a silent street of narrow, rather bleak and pinched two-story brick row houses, the most common form of English domestic architecture. But I was not prepared for what I saw when I entered the house: a depository of bizarre clutter and disorder. We entered a narrow passageway, made almost impassable by sagging cardboard cartons stacked to the ceiling, which led to a small, square, dimly lit, windowless room. There was a round white plastic table in the center, surrounded by ruined chairs of various kinds, the largest of which faced a television set. Along the walls and on the floor and on every surface hundreds, perhaps thousands, of objects were piled, as if the place were a secondhand shop into which the contents of ten other secondhand shops had been hurriedly crammed, and over everything there was a film of dust: not ordinary transient dust but dust that itself was overlaid with dust—dust that through the years had acquired almost a kind of objecthood, a sort of immanence. Through an archway near the entrance one could see into a dark bedroom with an unmade bed, on which rumpled bedding and vague piles of clothes lay, surrounded by shadowy stacks of more objects. One looked with relief to the daylit kitchen that opened off the living room. But one's relief was short-lived. In its way, the kitchen was the most disturbing room of all. Here, too, every surface swarmed with objects—hundreds of utensils, appliances, gadgets, bottles of condiments, boxes, baskets, dishes, jars jostling one another—so that all the functions of the room had been cancelled; the place was useless for the preparation of food and the cleaning up afterward. There was nowhere to put anything down or to work, or even to cook: the gas range was

out of commission and had become another surface for objects to proliferate on.

Robbie brought the boxed pizza and the parcel of olives and Heinz salad cream into the kitchen and gazed helplessly around, as if he had never seen the place before. Thomas had sunk into the chair facing the television set, but then painfully got up and began giving Robbie orders about the preparation of lunch. Robbie had found a place to work: a small section of a tiny cutting board, on which he was slicing tomatoes amid piles of old crumbs. He good-naturedly followed Thomas's imperious instructions, though he finally protested "But there's no room!" in response to some impossible command. After offering to help, and knowing I couldn't, I went back to the living room; the sight of the two old men squabbling and anxiously fumbling in the horrible kitchen was a painful one. Finally, the preparations were completed, and while the pizza warmed in one of two microwave ovens in the kitchen Robbie went upstairs to his own quarters and Thomas and I sat at the white table. Thomas started on a rambling story about his difficult and unlucky life, whose misfortunes had evidently been only compounded by the "malign, black vibrations" that "the Yeats influence" had released at 23 Fitzroy Road. I listened fitfully as he spoke of various jobs he had had that hadn't worked out, of his wife's leaving him for a rich businessman on the Isle of Wight, of one of his sons' running away from boarding school, of this person and that person by whom he felt badly used. As my eye had recoiled from the threatening multiplicity of objects in Thomas's house, so my mind retreated before the dulling incoherence of his monologue. In a note about the author at the end of "Last Encounters," R. C. Stuart (Robbie) has crisply ordered this material into a kind of job résumé—"Professor Trevor Thomas, administrator, artist, author, and actor, has had a varied and distinguished career"—citing "much praised" productions in which Thomas acted, his "uniquely distinctive" style of painting, his "revolutionary techniques of museum display," and his "impressive integrity." Now, in Thomas's peevish recital, the material was being restored to its primordial state.

Later, as I thought about Thomas's house (which I often did; one does not easily forget such a place), it appeared to me as a kind of monstrous allegory

of truth. This is the way things are, the place says. This is unmediated actuality, in all its multiplicity, randomness, inconsistency, redundancy, *authenticity*. Before the magisterial mess of Trevor Thomas's house, the orderly houses that most of us live in seem meagre and lifeless—as, in the same way, the narratives called biographies pale and shrink in the face of the disorderly actuality that is a life. The house also stirred my imagination as a metaphor for the problem of writing. Each person who sits down to write faces not a blank page but his own vastly overfilled mind. The problem is to clear out most of what is in it, to fill huge plastic garbage bags with the confused jumble of things that have accreted there over the days, months, years of being alive and taking things in through the eyes and ears and heart. The goal is to make a space where a few ideas and images and feelings may be so arranged that a reader will want to linger awhile among them, rather than to flee, as I had wanted to flee from Thomas's house. But this task of housecleaning (of narrating) is not merely arduous; it is dangerous. There is the danger of throwing the wrong things out and keeping the wrong things in; there is the danger of throwing too much out and being left with too bare a house; there is the danger of throwing everything out. Once one starts throwing out, it may become hard to stop. It may be better not to start. It may be better to hang on to everything, like Trevor Thomas, lest one be left with nothing. The fear that I felt in Thomas's house is a cousin of the fear felt by the writer who cannot risk beginning to write.

Robbie returned and served lunch. He brought each of us a plate on which a slice of pizza, potato salad, and olives and tomatoes had been nicely arranged, and which bore no trace of the struggle to produce it. Thomas stared at his plate and said, "Clarissa says that Olwyn told her that Sylvia said awful things about me. I don't believe that. She couldn't have disliked me as much as that and still come to me for help, could she? She might. I don't know."

I said, "One can have many feelings about a person. You yourself didn't like her, and at the same time you felt pity for her."

Robbie said, "Moods are not the same as permanent attitudes."

I said, "Do you feel as if you'd been there, too, Robbie?"

"I've heard Trevor tell it so many

times. Always the same. It never varies. He's got a photographic memory, a visual memory like a camera." Robbie spoke proudly, as if about a performing horse.

"I do," Thomas said. "When I tell you the story now, I see the scene. I see her standing there, I'm opening the door. There she is. Tears are streaming down her face. She is all red-eyed. Her hair looks awful. 'I'm going to die. Who will take care of my children?' I didn't know what to do. What would you have done? I said, 'Come in.' This was the second time. The first time was the night she rang my doorbell and said would I go start her car. There were big drifts of snow. I said, 'No.' I could have broken my wrist. 'You better phone the BBC.' Which she did—she was making a broadcast. They told her to call a taxi. While she was waiting, she said, 'I love all these old English things you have. You know, you remind me of my father. He was a professor, too, in America.' So she did know I had been a professor. But she never once asked me what I did. She never asked me if I painted, or if I drew, or was I an artist. I could have done a portrait of her if she had been cooperative."

"Did you ask her what *she* did?"

"Well, I just assumed she was a housewife," Thomas said, after a pause. He added, "I didn't know she was a writer until the night she got hysterical." In the scene in his memoir where Plath comes to his flat and speaks of the Jezebel who took Hughes away, she also shows him a page in the *Observer* where there is a review of "The Bell Jar" and on the facing page, as it happens, a poem by Hughes. Plath tells him that she is Victoria Lucas. Then, "with fierce intensity," she says, "He'll be down there with our friends, receiving their congratulations about his poem, the centre of admiration, free to come and go as he pleases. And here I am, a prisoner in this house, chained to the children."

I asked Thomas if he had read "The Bell Jar."

"Oh, yes indeed, after she died. I had read nothing of hers before she died. I

have never read any of her poetry. I'm not interested in poetry. I like novels. I like memoirs. Best of all, I like biographies. I think I write rather well myself. Clarissa says the style of my memoir is very moving. She says it is a very good style. I seemed to have been inspired in some way. It's readable, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Almost everybody has said, 'I couldn't put it down.' I don't see what Hughes has to complain about in it. I don't denigrate

on barristers. When she rang and said, 'Why don't we try to arrange a reconciliation? It's silly, you two men getting at each other this way,' Robbie said, 'Why don't we accept? All that hassle is distressing you.' I *was* terribly distressed. I became quite ill, didn't I, Robbie?"

"Yes. It was nervous exhaustion. So much worry. All those thoughts coming vividly back into his photographic memory. Again and again. Every time he has an interview, like today—"

Thomas cut in. "Oh, I don't mind that. It was Ted Hughes's threats. I was frightened of him, I was frightened that he would sue me. A bailiff came here. My solicitor told me that Hughes could take my house, my paintings—everything I have. This sounds a bit conceited, I know, but I think it's outrageous that one literary man—if Ted Hughes can be regarded as a literary man of any standing—would take this kind of action against a man like me, who is much older, and also of a certain intellectual calibre. I mean, my entry in *Who's Who* puts his entry to shame. His is just a catalogue of the books he wrote."

When it was time to go, the men overruled my idea of calling for a taxi and drove me to the station. Robbie managed better with the gearshift. In answer to a question from me about what he did, Robbie said that he had retired six years earlier, and described, in baffling technical detail, his work in electronics. When he finished, Thomas said, "You see, there's more to Robbie than you would think."

On the train, I read a copy of Thomas's *Who's Who* entry which he had given me. It was long, and listed many jobs in museums and universities, several of only a year's duration, and cited three publications in museum journals. Then I made notes on Trevor Thomas's house. I knew that the labyrinth of the Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes story would eventually lead me back to it—the Aleph of my tale—and that when the time came I would want evidence that I had not merely conjured it up for the purposes of my plot but had seen it as well. ♦



Before Plath moved into the Yeats house with her children, in December, 1962, she wrote her mother that it was the house "where I've always wanted to live."

him in any way. Robbie, don't put milk in. Janet doesn't want milk."

"I know. This is for you."

"I've already got one here."

"That's stone cold. I've made a fresh one."

Thomas stared with displeasure at the cup of tea Robbie put before him. Then he said, "When Miss Malpass rang—she's in the big law firm that represents Ted, of Nabarro Nathanson. They're Jewish, basically. They have a huge roster of solicitors. They can draw

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

PEARLS AMONG SWINE

BY ANTHONY LANE

“WHEN I was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago I lived in a small town where they were all after me on account of what I done on Mrs Nugent.” Thus begins “The Butcher Boy” (Fromm; \$19.95), the third novel by the Irish writer Patrick McCabe, and already you can sense a rough ride ahead. The sentence itself travels a long way, from the pastoral mildness of the opening phrase—the memory’s soft fumble for the right decade—to a final knock of violence that clears the head. What kind of voice changes its tack with such threatening speed? And do you really want to meet its owner?

Bad luck, you haven’t any choice. Francie Brady is on you from the moment you open the book, like a mugger with his breath on your nape, and it’s no good pretending that he will go away. “The Butcher Boy” is not just written in the first person; it’s tyrannized by it, held for ransom by a central figure who will scarcely grant any of the other characters the right to speak. And, when they do, everything they say is taken over and used as evidence against them. “I said thank you very much Mrs Connolly and what did she say then only ah God love you sure who have you now they’re all gone I thought what did she have to say that for what did you have to say that for.” Somewhere in that hasty clatter of monosyllables Mrs. Connolly is show-

ing herself to be a kind soul, but Francie opens and closes the sentence with his own words, caging her kindness in, as though wary of letting it see the light.

Francie is a boy growing up in Ireland, his head blurry with movies and television, his mouth full of candies. It is the early nineteen-sixties, though the reference points are hard to find; I was glad to come upon a mention of the Cuban missile crisis. Francie does not sail above such things; he dwells far below, and the landmarks of public history, like the courtesies of common discourse, serve only to excite his scorn. One particular target is Philip Nugent—polite, privately educated, and blessed with a fine collection of comic books, finer than Francie and his friend Joe can bear. “We had to have them and that was that.” From here on, his campaign against the Nugent family intensifies; they put Francie’s own household to shame. His mother is dredged from the local lake, his father drowned merely in drink: “He clutched the whiskey glass like a weapon and poured himself another.” Francie himself is sent to a special school, there to be molested by a moist-lipped priest—a hideous parody of a confessor, begging his charge to name “the worst bad thing I ever did,” and plainly aroused by what he hears. All this should make depressing reading, yet McCabe finds something buoyant in the ritual misery. When a broken home meets a lively mind, you believe in both, and in the

busy wreckage of their encounter. The novel has been praised as a portrait of evil, but, at least to begin with, it’s more like a sketch of badness, which is far less lofty and more interesting. Francie is not unique; he is everyone’s bored and fanciful child taken to a logical extreme, where morality loses its grip.

Plenty goes on in “The Butcher Boy,” but it doesn’t feel plotted; Francie veers from one perception to the next, and his anarchy soaks into the bones of the book. The layout helps: short passages, few of them longer than a page, set apart from each other by white space. They look like thoughts that have been surgically removed from Francie’s mind and deposited on paper for inspection before they’ve had a chance to connect or coalesce. Once you finish the book, glance back and you won’t find any traces of story—it seems to have evaporated. For all the blood and guts—and there are handfuls of the stuff—there is a surprising want of substance. You may gag on Francie’s deeds, but your disgust never goes deep; it just hangs around, like a sick dark taste at the back of the throat. It mingles with other reactions, too; you find yourself laughing at this fiend, the low-lifer with high spirits. He even earns a drop of pity, although he wouldn’t dream of asking for it: “I tried to get at my wrists with the jaggy bit of the statue. I managed to get at bits but it was doing no damage you could still be at it in a hundred years time the way it was going.” Just for a second, Francie is no longer the aggressor but the victim—born without a chance, snagged and flailing on the wires of his own nature.

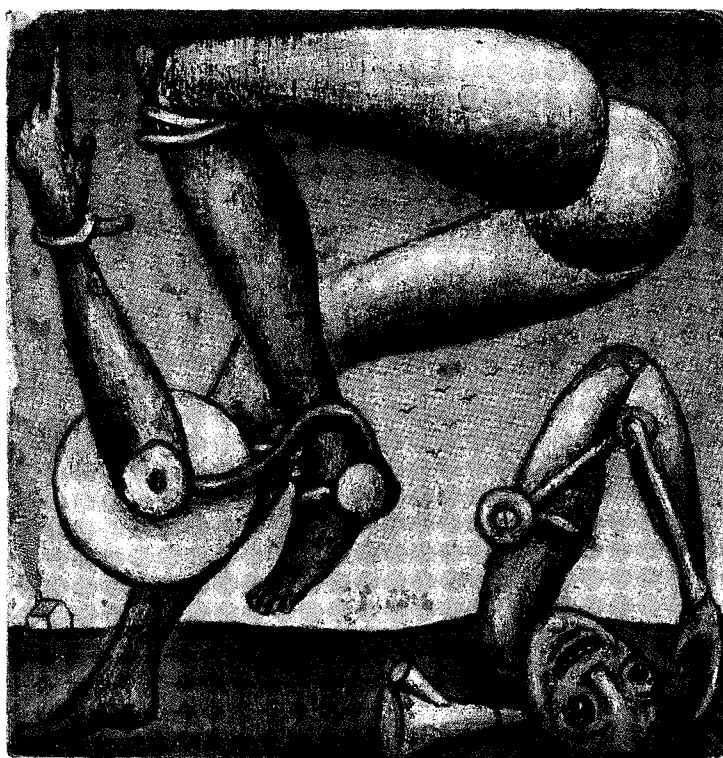
Eventually, he leaves the school and returns home to take a job at the

slaughterhouse. Having gone badly wrong, he goes simply mad, and the whole novel follows suit; something in it tips over the edge. It wasn't exactly Barbara Pym to start with, but now plausibility is brushed aside in favor of gothic contrivance. It is in the nature of gothic, of course, to furnish itself with the trappings of excess; even as you urge it toward the limits, you find yourself saying, "Oh, come on." But it seems just too convenient that our hero should suddenly find his *métier*, braining piglets with a bolt gun. All through the book, in the course of his sour reveries, Francie has accused others of piggishness; he has imagined the Nugent family, pink and snouted, fouling their own pristine home. And now, what do you know, we have real porkers and proper filth. This cheapens the earlier episodes; they become simple standard-bearers in a grand symbolic parade, heading for a bestial showdown. It's no surprise that the finale brims with horror, but the fright feels wild and rigged, with the novelist playing stage manager: "He walked into the light hanging in front of his face it went swinging back and forth painting the big shadows on the walls and ceilings."

This is disappointing, because McCabe doesn't need to try so hard. He is essentially a man for the firsthand, squashing his hero's nose up against brute fact. "The Butcher Boy" is packed with chunky Irish words to savor and store away; what other book would teach you how to dunt someone in the crigs? The best of the nastiness is not flamboyant but slides in quiet, unsuspected crannies of the prose—in simple prepositions, for example. "That nearly drove him astray in the head altogether. The sweat hopped off him." And look at that opening sentence again, at "what I done on Mrs Nugent." Any other novelist would have written "done to," but "on" has both the stamp of intent and an air of studiousness—Francie has done good work on his victim. This warped pa-

tience, the malice that is always aforesaid, has a decisive effect on the book's sense of time. Francie doesn't hustle or lash out; he proceeds through considered evils, great and small. Though wide awake himself, he is everyone's bad dream; normal life has been suspended, awaiting the animation of his presence.

One of the book's many achievements is to make us think afresh about the life of the mind—a notion that has grown rarefied, even genteel, through years of literary cossetting. McCabe grabs it and scuffs it, he earths it in close detail: "This brr was starting in my head like the noise the telly used to make if you fell asleep at night



watching it." The book seethes with mental white noise, not just the "brr" but an "ee ee" and a "ssssss," a "yamma yamma yamma" and an ominous "drrrumm drrrumm." They remind you that Francie is just a kid, merrily impersonating the world around him, but they also echo an earlier sound—"Rtststr," the rattle of pebbles as heard by Leopold Bloom. McCabe, as you would expect, knows his "Ulysses" inside out: you cannot write "His cheeks were fat red plums and he blew a puffjet of steam," I think, without having read "Hot mock-turtle vapour and steam of newbaked jumpuffs rolpoly poured out from

Harrison's." From Joyce, through Beckett, to Seamus Heaney, this Irish resolve to get at sensations, not to rest until the peculiar essence is wrung from them, has startled the modern ear. McCabe has inherited that perseverance, coining these freshly minted phrases to pay the world back for what it throws our way.

Such is his skill that you rarely pause to ask whether these are the words of a boy. Beckett's Molloy and Malone spoke at full strength; their first-person narratives ranged high and low, with a courteous literacy that mocked their feeble circumstance. Francie Brady is an innocent, however, and his knowledge has a gruesome practicality; we see him open up a person but never a book. McCabe has to make him foolish enough to gabble, yet also touched with enough accidental poetry to let the stream of consciousness run smooth: "There was a smell of old porter and a whiff coming from the men's toilets, it was a bar of dead years." There are moments when the imitator of pigs sounds more like a reader of Yeats: "I cupped my hand and the echo glided in low under the laurels." The whole book, in a way, rests on those laurels; it tells us that a terrible beauty can always be born, even out of small-town murder. I don't believe it for a minute, and most of us would prefer never to believe it; but the relentless voice of Francie Brady, with its unkempt grace and silliness, almost persuades us otherwise. "The Butcher Boy" may be an extraordinary novel, but it leaves you fighting to get back to the ordinary. ♦

WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE DEPT.

[From the *New Windsor* (N.Y.) *Sentinel*]

Anderson was chief of the Associated Press's Middle East bureau in Beirut, Lebanon when he was abducted by terrorists in March, 1985. He spent the next seven years in a tiny cell, chained most of the time, often alone and hungry. He was released last year by his captors and has written a book, "Den of Lions," about his ordeal with his new wife, Madelaine.

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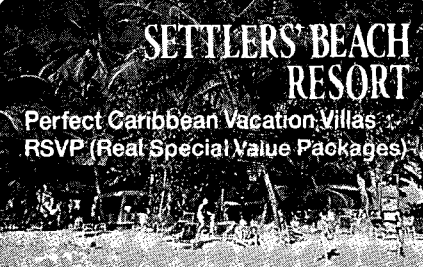
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THE THEATRE

INNOCENT ABOARD

BY EDITH OLIVER

I CAN think of no more invigorating evening than "Annie Warbucks," a beguiling piece of foolishness at a perfect Off Broadway theatre, the Variety Arts. A sequel, after sixteen years, to "Annie," it, too, has a book by Thomas Meehan and music and lyrics by Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin—the old team at its absolute best. Annie, this time, is nine-year-old Kathryn Zaremba, and although "adorable" is usually a killer when applied to a child actress, that is indeed what she is. She never makes a wrong move, and her singing is strong and clear. When the show opens, Annie is living in the penthouse of her adoptive father, Daddy Warbucks, and a bossy commissioner (Alene

Robertson) will undo the adoption unless Daddy marries. Annie's candidate is Daddy's beautiful secretary (Marguerite MacIntyre), but he is attracted to a scheming Mrs. Kelly (Donna McKechnie, as a heavy!)—so Annie, calling herself "Ruby Keeler," runs away to the Tennessee Valley, and there meets a worthy poor farmer and his wife and daughter. Eventually, our girl admits that she is really Annie Warbucks; the farmer insists upon taking her right to the White House; and President Franklin Roosevelt and Daddy celebrate her return. And so on and so on. The farmer is awarded a hundred thousand dollars; Roosevelt, in spite of some opposition from Senator Vandenberg, establishes the T.V.A.; Mrs. Kelly's villainy is unmasked; Daddy reveals that he has always loved his beautiful secretary and decides to marry her; Annie's adoption, we learn, was never in question; the schem-

ing commissioner gets her comeuppance; and everybody lives happily ever after.

In most musicals, the book is the least of it, but Mr. Meehan's is especially lively and funny. The songs—particularly Miss McKechnie's "But You Go On" and Miss Zaremba's "I Got Me" and "I Always Knew"—are gems; they stick in the memory. The show has been elegantly cast. Harve Presnell, his bald head gleaming, is Daddy Warbucks come to life. The performance of Harvey Evans, as the Tennessee farmer, breaks the boundaries of musical comedy. Needless to say, Raymond Thome gives as much enjoyment as he seems to get out of the role of F.D.R. No commissioner was ever gruffer or more menacing than Miss Robert-

son, and no young woman more romantic than Miss MacIntyre. The other children, by the way—the other orphans—are a credit to their profession. A livelier bunch has rarely existed. The choreography is by Peter Gennaro; the settings are by Ming Cho Lee; the costumes are by Theoni V. Aldredge; and the lighting is by Ken Billington—an honor roll, theatrically speaking. The sound, though amplified (why, in a little theatre like this one?), is at least kept within decent limits. Every word, sung or spoken, can be heard. There's a chance, of course, that "Annie Warbucks" is a show literally for young and old: the kids at the matinee that I saw were all but dancing in the aisles, and I and at least one of my colleagues had a splendid time as we were transported back to the days of the New Deal. Those in between will just have to take their chances. ♦



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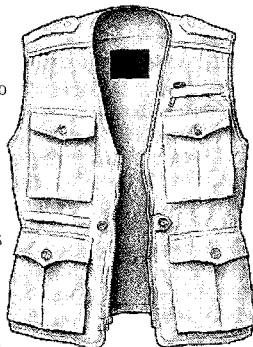
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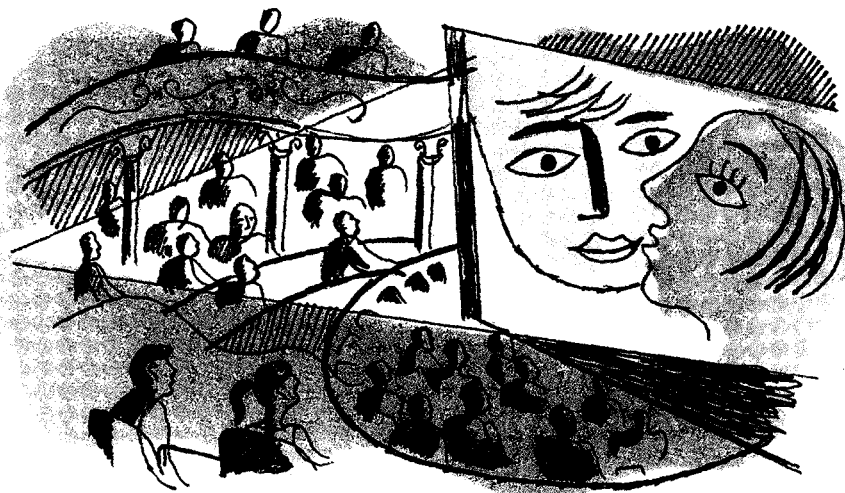
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THE USUAL SUSPECTS

BY TERENCE RAFFERTY



IT has been a long time since Woody Allen made a movie whose sole purpose was to make the audience laugh. His new picture, "Manhattan Murder Mystery," is his lightest and most unabashedly frivolous feature since "Broadway Danny Rose," in 1984. Allen—perhaps sensing that even his hardest-core fans will no longer grant him the moral authority to pontificate on love, death, and the inscrutable silence of God—has set his sights pretty low this time around. All that "Manhattan Murder Mystery" aspires to be is a speedy, bubbly screwball-comedy whodunit; he isn't trying to remake "Wild Strawberries" or "8½" or "Faces," and for that filmgoers should feel grateful. Early in the picture, we see the hero, Larry Lipton (Allen), attempting to cut short a late-night visit with his elderly neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. House, because he doesn't want to miss an old Bob Hope movie on TV; soon thereafter, Larry finds himself embroiled in a farcical crime story that's meant to recall forties Hope vehicles like "My Favorite Brunette." As a crime-fighter, Larry (who works as an editor at a large publishing house) is as reluctant and as cowardly as Hope's characters were, and the hero's compulsively verbalized anxiety is the basis of most of the movie's humor: every wisecrack he sputters out sounds like a variation on the essential Hope theme, which is "How do I get out of here?" "Manhattan Murder Mystery" is simple stuff, but Allen hasn't practiced the simple art of popular enter-

tainment in quite a while, and he's rusty. He's like a basketball player who has spent so much time working on fancy moves that he can't sink a free throw anymore.

Allen has always been hung up on the idea of innocence—think of Mariel Hemingway in "Manhattan," Juliette Lewis in "Husbands and Wives," the misty-eyed cultural nostalgia of "Radio Days," the miraculous pregnancy announced in the final scene of "Hannah and Her Sisters." And, in a sense, "Manhattan Murder Mystery" is his attempt to recapture the (relative) innocence of his seventies movies, to reestablish the purity of a comedian's relationship with a helplessly laughing crowd. His leading lady here is Diane Keaton, who, except for a tiny role in "Radio Days," hasn't appeared in a Woody Allen picture since "Manhattan," in 1979. (She plays Larry's wife, Carol.) The screenplay is a collaboration with Marshall Brickman, who also shared credit with Allen on "Sleeper," "Annie Hall," and "Manhattan." The story might even be an abandoned script idea from the mid-seventies: Eric Lax's biography of Allen reports that Allen and Brickman, in the early days of writing "Annie Hall," discussed having the hero and the heroine "become involved with their next-door neighbor, who is killing his wife." In "Manhattan Murder Mystery," Mrs. House (Lynn Cohen) drops dead of an apparent heart attack, but Carol is convinced that Mr. House (Jerry Adler) did her in. Allen and Brickman have dusted off a perfectly service-

ALLAN DRUMMOND

able comic premise and have tried to reëvoke the lovable-neurotic style of the "Annie Hall" days; yet, for all their efforts, the picture's tone feels tentative—as fumbling and as painfully decorous as an old couple's last-ditch attempt to reawaken youthful passion. It's a nice try, really; Allen takes us out for a pleasant, amusing night on the town, and we do appreciate it. Seems like old times, as Keaton sang, with precocious weariness, in "Annie Hall"; but the thrill is gone.

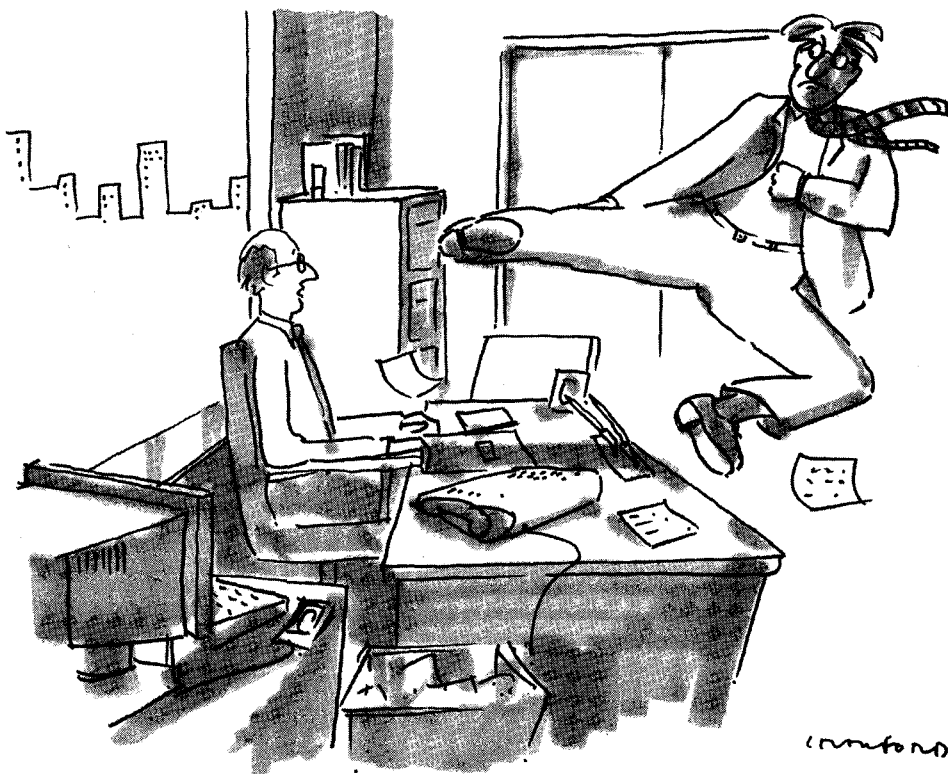
The rhetoric of "Manhattan Murder Mystery"—the modest message underlying the antics of the picture's scatterbrained amateur sleuths—is that Larry and Carol's cozy, boring middle-aged marriage is somehow enriched, perhaps even saved, by the danger and excitement of their pursuit of Mr. House. Prying into the affairs of a sinister neighbor did wonders for the shaky relationship of James Stewart and Grace Kelly in "Rear Window," too. You could call "Manhattan Murder Mystery" a comic version of "Rear Window" if it weren't for the inconvenient fact that "Rear Window" is a much funnier picture. Hitchcock, with his icy detachment, understands the sick humor of New Yorkers' curiosity about their neighbors; Allen doesn't seem to have any kind of ironic perspective on his characters. The Liptons and their friends, Ted

(Alan Alda) and Marcia (Anjelica Huston), are drawn from the director's familiar repertory of Manhattan media professionals—Ted's a playwright, Marcia's a novelist—and they're all presented as adorable intellectual zanies: the movie never seriously considers the idea that there might be something a touch unsavory about a pack of culture vultures who treat strangers' lives as juicy, lurid entertainment.

Of course, thoughts like that wouldn't cross the audience's minds, either, if the picture had more big laughs; great jokes reduce all arguments to rubble. The humor in "Manhattan Murder Mystery" thins out as the movie goes along because Allen tends to labor, and even to repeat, his gags. Early on, the movie establishes that Carol is much keener on playing detective than Larry is, and that she considers him an awful stick-in-the-mud for discouraging her inquiries. This radical discrepancy in their degrees of adventurousness generates some chuckles at first, but it gets tiresome very quickly. In the second half of the picture, every scene between Larry and Carol seems to follow the same formula: he trots along beside her and whines "Are you *crazy*?" (or some one-liner variant thereof) as she plunges them into yet another dangerous situation. After a few of these desperate, strained scenes, you begin to realize that

Allen has written for himself a character that he probably can't play anymore. The stylized jitteriness that worked so well for him in the seventies—the tics, the stammers, the panicked reactions to the slightest physical threats, the nervous jokes about death—feels a little unsettling now, and it's a lot harder to laugh at. What was funny about Woody's persona in the old days was that his characters, in their thirties or early forties, had such fine-tuned early-warning systems for predicting disaster. Now that he's in his late fifties, the comic disproportion between his morbid fears and the reasonable expectations of a man his age isn't so great, and his flailing, frenzied responses to life's uncertainties feel sadder than they should. We can't help thinking that by this point he ought to know how to roll with the punches; in this picture, his trademark dithering feels unseemly, and it undermines the frothy, madcap mood he's trying to create.

Shtick, even at its most inspired, is highly perishable; failing to recognize when it has lost its freshness is an occupational hazard for comedians. The brashness, the frank cowardice, and the enthusiastic lechery of the characters Bob Hope played in his forties comedies aren't especially attractive in his sixties pictures: somehow, his smart-mouthed Everyman charm turned into something smug, leering, and arrogant. At the climax of "Manhattan Murder Mystery," people with guns stalk each other in a room full of mirrors while behind them a movie screen shows the famous fun-house-mirror shootout from Orson Welles' "The Lady from Shanghai." When the smoke has cleared, Larry delivers the punch line: "I'll never say that life doesn't imitate art again." Since life *always* imitates art in Allen's pictures, this statement does not strike the audience with the force of revelation. The real lesson of "Manhattan Murder Mystery" is that art about life imitating art is generally the product of wishful thinking. The "life" in this picture doesn't resemble "Rear Window" or "The Lady from Shanghai" or "Annie Hall," or even "My Favorite Brunette"—it's more like a late-Hope turkey on the order of "I'll Take Sweden" or "Cancel My Reservation." In the end, the mild diversions of "Manhattan Murder Mystery" don't add up to a real return to form for Woody Allen, or effect a reconciliation between an artist and an audience who have grown estranged. Thanks for the memories, though. ♦



"Is this something that could hold till Monday, Chris?"

MYSTERY & CRIME

The Night Managerby John le Carré
(Knopf; \$24)

A HIGHLY entertaining thriller by the man who once made thrillers like this seem slightly dishonest. The hero, an Englishman called Pine, is fluent in several tongues, an adept of the martial arts, a crack yachtsman who can catch fish with his bare hands and whip up a three-star carrot cake, and a brooding, self-sufficient type who flutters the hearts of the consorts of rich evildoers. The principal rich evildoer here is Richard Onslow Roper, who lives beyond the reach of British law and the Inland Revenue on a private island in the Exumas, where he perpetrates arms-for-drugs unpleasantness on a global scale. Can Pine penetrate this fellow's entourage, seduce his lady, foil his latest deal, confute his accomplices in the upper echelons of the Anglo-American intelligence establishment, and live to animate a sequel or two? Does James Bond have a license to kill? Since this is, after all, le Carré, the heroics are accompanied by a degree of philosophical abyss-staring not conventionally associated with (though not entirely unknown to) 007, and the writing is two brows above anything Ian Fleming ever attempted. But wasn't it the rather compelling point of the Smiley books that spying is not quite so glamorous, and good and evil are not quite so unambiguous, as the public rhetoric and the popular fiction of the Cold War pretended? Now that the Cold War is over, le Carré's moral atmosphere seems to have cleared considerably. Some readers may miss the fog.

Saratoga Hauntingby Stephen Dobyns
(Viking; \$19)

DOBYNS is a poet who also writes detective novels, and this lends his fiction a how uncommon in the genre. The scene here is Saratoga Springs, and the detective is the moodily reflective Charlie Bradshaw, a local cop turned private investigator, and it is his past as a policeman that haunts this adventure. The body of a woman embezzler who was thought to have fled to Latin America twenty years before is disinterred in a demolition project—a strong hint that Bradshaw mishandled the case. At the

BOOKS
BRIEFLY NOTED

same time, a bank robber of the past era is released from prison, vowing revenge on the man who sent him there—Bradshaw. Charlie Bradshaw is a standup, full-fashioned creation, but the author is equally generous with an entourage of lesser characters, and equally sharp in giving life to even the least of them.

Missing Josephby Elizabeth George
(Bantam; \$21.95)

GEORGE's sixth book is about the vagaries of mother love. After Deborah St. James meets a kindly vicar at the National Gallery, she and her husband, Simon, a forensic scientist, decide to visit the vicar's Lancashire parish. They arrive to find that the vicar has died, after a supper of wild parsnips cooked up by the local herbalist. The parsnips turn out to be hemlock and the verdict is death by accident, but it begins to unravel when Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley, gliding over the winter landscape in his Bentley, casts a cold eye. The plot, which includes Deborah and Simon's unsuccessful attempts to have a child, the doubtful parentage of the herbalist's sexually precocious young daughter, and the mutterings of the county's gigantic, ribald witch, proves to be as intricate as a genetic code. George's core cast of elegantly infuriating characters will be familiar to her fans, but in this book Detective Sergeant Barbara Havers, her best invention, makes only a few sardonic appearances—she's busy moving to a new house.

Pleading Guiltyby Scott Turow
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$24)

IN this "legal thriller," an Irish, alcoholic ex-cop turned lawyer gets enmeshed in the boardroom politics of a white-shoe firm trying to cover up a multimillion-dollar theft from a prominent client's account. It's as if a character from a George Higgins novel had stumbled into one by John

Grisham. In keeping with the rules of this trendy genre, the plot is of byzantine complexity, there's at least one scene involving an offshore money transfer, and characters are constantly invoking attorney-client privilege. The nonlegal material is more interesting by far, especially the cynical asides and ruminations of the moody protagonist, Mack Malloy, whose gift of gab is such that even when he's hung over he can reel off page after page of perfect prose. This is a harder trick than it sounds, because the novel is supposedly all on tape, dictated by Mack at odd hours of the night. Either he's a master of elocution or his recorder has been equipped with a device his firm should patent—one that turns ordinary speech into something that can almost pass for literature.

Sacred Clownsby Tony Hillerman
(HarperCollins; \$23)

HILLERMAN's twelfth reservation mystery is another braided account of the separate investigations of Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee, of the Navajo Tribal Police. The cases involve the apparently unrelated murders of two benevolent jesters—one of them a Tano tribesman killed during a ceremony mocking the sale of sacred objects, the other a beloved white teacher and woodworker at a Catholic Indian school far away from the Tano Pueblo—and the sorting out of clues requires, as usual, the study of metaphysical and spiritual forces as well as careful police procedure. Political corruption, controversy involving proposed toxic-waste sites and radical environmentalists, and small disasters resulting from Indian alcohol abuse complicate and illuminate the landscape of Leaphorn and Chee's vast Southwestern jurisdiction. The two also share romantic uncertainties: Leaphorn, an older widower still in mourning, is trying to accept the attentions of a woman anthropology professor, and Chee is finally getting serious about Janet Pete, the beautiful half-Navajo defense attorney whose clan background may make their relationship taboo under the religious tradition Chee is trying to preserve. Hillerman's clean style and his command of the Indians' honor-laden ways make it almost beside the point that the perpetrators are immediately obvious; the sinuous course of the investigations unfolds mysteries deeper than the identities of criminals. ♦



SHOUTS AND MURMURS

INJUN SUMMER

BY DANIEL MENAKER

MY two kids go to a nice little coed camp on a pretty lake in the Berkshires. I'll call it Camp North Wind. Nothing fancy—no single-match survival training, no tennis pro vending his name and dropping in for a half-hour pep talk, no Force 8 sailing ordeals. Just a sprinkling of white cabins, a grove of tall pines, a few tennis courts, a baseball field, etc. The counsellors tend to be English or Scottish, since their American contemporaries are all starting software businesses in their parents' basements. There's a contingent of Latin Americans, too—names like César and Raúl ring out among the pines, along with Colin, Fiona, etc.—and the campers include Jews, Christians, blacks, Amerasians. In short, the whole place is a heartening, unpretentious melting pot. Many camps cater to a certain clientele, and for this reason they try to put forward an identity of one kind or another. But not North Wind, as far as I know.

Except for the Indian stuff. The atmosphere at North Wind is lightly charged with the same yearning for the ethos of the American Indian—or the myth of that ethos—which for a long time permeated much of the camping movement in America. This tradition, ebbing elsewhere under the influence of political correctness, lingers at North Wind. Every kid in the camp is either a Cherokee or a Mahaiwe. The cabins are called Wichita, Cheyenne, Mohawk, and so forth. The elite older campers earn bear claws in character, service, and activities, and must endure an initiating task of some sort in order to become Webelos (big cheeses).

It is at the Thursday-night campfire that the Indian atmosphere gets thickest. To the beat of a tomtom, the campers form a circle around the fire. The Webelos—teen-age boys, naked to the waist (one enjoys speculating about the attire of the first Webelette) and wearing headdresses of white feathers tipped with red and black—stand in the middle, being serious. The main Webelo has a very long headdress and walks around with a big stick. Campers and counsellors sing songs and put on skits, and there are games pitting Cherokee against Mahaiwe, during which half the camp rumbles “Mahaiwe, Mahaiwe,” while the other half chants “Cherokee, Cherokee,” with both factions sounding more like Public Enemy than the pre-Columbian citizenry.

After every event, the head Webelo says something like “For this contest of strength [or “For this entertaining song”] the tribes of North Wind say”—and here the entire camp joins in—“How!” At a recent campfire, the songs included “Stand by Me,” and the contests involved egg-catching

as well as log-chopping, and patches were awarded not only for canoeing and archery but for aerobics. So it's clear that the camp's Indian foundation is a bit rickety.

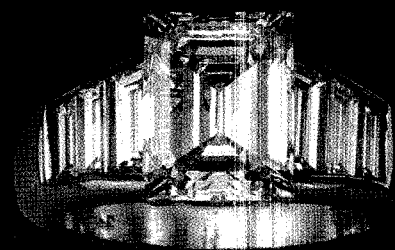
And definitely politically incorrect. I mean, this shall we say unrigorous plundering of the history of a victimized people would—like the Tomahawk Chop practiced by Atlanta Braves fans—surely elicit outrage from purists. It's all a mishmash. There is no such tribe as Mahaiwe (“Mahaiwe” is an Indian word meaning “place downstream”); “Webelos” isn't an Indian term but a purloined Boy Scout portmanteau for “We'll be loyal Scouts”; and you can be fairly sure that no Algonquin ever received a patch with a peel-off backing. This kind of ersatz ritual debases cultural and historical matters of great controversy, I can hear the moralists saying.

Too bad. I like it. I like it not only because it is politically incorrect but because, however inaccurately and comically, it implies a code of conduct and a relationship to nature that are at odds with and superior to the kinds of lives the campers and their families are presumed to lead. Even a dented and misapprehended ideal is better than no ideal at all, and one cannot help being stirred just by the name of those to whom the ideal is attributed: Abnaki, Mohican, Dakota. To those real tribes, in gratitude for this adulterated but still compelling legacy, the jury-rigged tribes of North Wind, sitting around the last campfire of the summer in their fade haircuts and “Beavis and Butt-Head” T-shirts—the tribes of North Wind and their parents say, “How!” ♦



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a diamond ring she
almost forgot to say yes."*

*I'll always remember that
face. The smile bordering on
a tear. Silence as powerful
as music. Eyes as lively as the
diamond I nervously slipped
on her finger. And now
that we have come so far
together, perhaps now is the
moment to celebrate that love,
once again, with a diamond
as exceptional as our love.*



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THE BOMBAY SAPPHIRE MARTINI. AS ENVISIONED BY MICHAEL GRAVES.

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